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**editorial address**

The Editors, **Screen**,  
Gilmorehill Centre,  
University of Glasgow,  
Glasgow G12 8QQ.  
[screen@arts.gla.ac.uk](mailto:screen@arts.gla.ac.uk)

**internet sites:**

<http://www.Screen.arts.gla.ac.uk>  
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**issue editor**

Jackie Stacey

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# Cinema's double: some reflections on Metz

RICHARD RUSHTON

The discipline of film studies is slowly erasing the psychoanalytic approaches that were so valuable to it in the 1970s and 1980s. Even in view of a recent collection on psychoanalysis and cinema<sup>1</sup> and the increasing influence of the work of Slavoj Žižek, I would argue that the engagement between psychoanalysis and cinema has, to a large degree, disappeared from the agenda of most film students and scholars. Certainly, many contributions (like Žižek's) have illuminated the theory of psychoanalysis itself, particularly the theories of a Lacanian variety, *by way of* film, as have many analyses illustrated psychoanalytic ideas *within* specific films, to the extent that such analyses may have told us a great deal about psychoanalysis but precious little about films or the nature of cinema.<sup>2</sup> The psychoanalytic models of filmic processes and film spectatorship – those analyses which utilize psychoanalysis in an ontological enquiry into the nature of film – are currently a rare species, if not altogether extinct.

I propose in this essay to return to some of the ideas put forward by Christian Metz, specifically those inspired by psychoanalysis and expressed in his essay 'The imaginary signifier'. It is hoped that some of Metz's reflections on the nature of cinema and our relationship to it may be considered through fresh eyes.

It was encouraging to see Metz being treated somewhat sympathetically in Mark Vernet's recent meditation on theories of fetishism in cinema.<sup>3</sup> Vernet directs the reader towards the question of why Metz's analysis of fetishism 'has not received the attention it deserves' and comes across a tell-tale answer: Metz's analysis is

1 Janet Bergstrom (ed.) *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

2 Žižek's recent publication *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001) aims more directly at issues of film theory (such as suture and the gaze).

3 Mark Vernet, 'The fetish in the theory and history of the cinema', in Bergstrom (ed.) *Endless Night*, p. 91.

4 Ibid p 92

flawed because of its reliance on a theory of transcendent spectatorship, where 'the subject triumphs insofar as he is the owner of the look'<sup>4</sup> This is, as Vernet points out, a spectator–subject associated with the theory of perspective in painting, a subject historically linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie in western societies, and therefore a subject whose overarching wish is to be the master of all he surveys (and, as countless feminist analyses have made clear, the cinema spectator is master of all *he* surveys). Vernet thus points out that the viewing subject is founded on the basis of this wish for mastery, though he stresses that 'Metz considered it useful to insist that this omniscience is precisely such because the subject is looking for that which cannot be seen, that which cannot be offered to the subject's vision'.<sup>5</sup> And there one receives the final condemnation, for 'the look is still marked by lack'.<sup>6</sup>

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

There is a need to examine more closely this masterful subject who is also marked by lack. I propose to do this first of all by investigating some of Metz's remarks on absence (if it can be assumed that absence = lack) which are clearly outlined in his comparison between a spectator at the theatre and a spectator at the cinema

According to Metz, both theatre and cinema involve simultaneously seeing and hearing as well as movement and temporal progression. These features of movement and temporal progression are not available to the traditional arts of painting, sculpture or photography. But cinema, unlike the theatre, consists merely of images instead of 'real action'. The space in which a theatrical play occurs is the same space as that which is occupied by the audience during a performance: 'everything the audience sees and hears', Metz asserts, 'is actively produced in their presence, by human beings or props which are themselves present'; they occur in the 'same scene' as the audience.<sup>7</sup> There is unambiguously a sense of one's own body, as a member of the audience, being proximate and co-present with the action on the stage.

7 Christian Metz 'The imaginary signifier' in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier* trans Celia Britton Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan 1982), p 43

Cinema, on the other hand, presents an 'other scene', scenes from which the spectator is absent. 'what unfolds there' on the cinema screen, Metz explains, 'may [as in theatre] be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is fictional: the actor, the décor, the words one hears are all absent'. For this reason, Metz declares, 'Every film is a fiction film'.<sup>8</sup> Because the film is projected into a realm from which the spectator is invariably absent, an 'other scene' where the spectator cannot be said to play any part in the space or time of the action, then film, *all* film, unfolds in a region that is separable from the space of the actual cinema theatre, a region on or behind the screen that Metz designates as 'fictional', purely for the fact that it opens up a vista that is distinct from the real scene of the cinema theatre itself – it is 'twice removed'. Hence, Metz puts forward the idea of cinema's 'imaginary signifier': 'What is characteristic of the

8 Ibid p 44

cinema is not the imaginary that it may happen to represent, but the imaginary that it *is* from the start'.<sup>9</sup>

Metz claims that this doubled imaginarieness of cinema entails an entirely new paradigm in the history of the arts (or at least in the history of representation). Any traditional representation assumes a dialectical relationship between a real object and an imagined one. the real object is the artwork (its paint or marble, its material reality) which gives rise to an imaginary representation, it is the job of the artistic material to mimic what is being represented (for example, marble imitates flesh). Metz contrasts this with cinema's radical departure from the traditional dialectic. With cinema the reality of the artistic surface is compromised, the process by which images are represented is fictional. In the cinema, we are not presented with a 'real' object for our contemplation, for what is projected onto the screen are not real objects, but mere shadows or reflections, 'a film cannot be *touched*, cannot be carried and handled'.<sup>10</sup> With the traditional arts a real object gives rise to an imaginary scene or object. With the cinema, on the other hand, an imaginary object (the projections on the screen) gives rise to an imaginary scene – it is *doubly* imaginary.

<sup>10</sup> Metz 'Photography and fetish', *October* no. 34 (1985) p. 88

What conclusions does Metz draw from this observation? He argues that the cinema is a *fictional apparatus referring to fiction*, or in other words, an imaginary apparatus referring to imaginary scenes and situations. This essential doubling capacity of the cinema performs, however, a remarkably strange function because of its doubling: it brings us closer to a vision of reality than any of the other artforms. The spectator finds it easier to accept the fictional representation of fiction that is produced by the cinema than the materially real presentation of theatre. The fiction of the theatre is 'obviously' fiction, it draws attention to itself as fiction, as 'staged', whereas the fictionality of what is represented in cinema is effectively elided by its fictional representation. In the cinema, unlike the theatre, there is no contradiction between what is represented and the representational process itself. That is, in the cinema, what is being represented is coincident with the way in which it is represented – imaginary scenes are represented in an imaginary way and, hence, the representation is psychologically more convincing.

Metz is here reiterating the arguments he made some years before in his essay 'On the impression of reality in the cinema', where he states that 'Films give us the feeling that we are watching an almost real spectacle'.<sup>11</sup> In that earlier article, Metz attributes the impression of reality in the cinema to its 'segregation of spaces' – the space where I sit in front of the screen is of an entirely different order of reality, or is of a different dimension to the space of the filmic diegesis that is 'on' or 'in' the screen. Nothing I do from my seat can alter that self-contained screen-world, and this self-containment,

<sup>11</sup> Metz 'On the impression of reality in the cinema' *Film Language: a Semiotics of the Cinema* trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) p. 4

12 Ibid p 10

its very virtue of containing within itself 'another world', grants it the integrity of reality<sup>12</sup> It does not matter whether this other world is of a 'realist' persuasion or not, indeed, the cinema seems particularly amenable to fantastic and imaginary worlds: 'the power of unreality in film derives from the fact that the unreal seems to have been realized, unfolding before our eyes as if it were the flow of common occurrence'.<sup>13</sup>

13 Ibid p 5

It is on this imaginary belief in such realized worlds that Metz focuses in his writings on psychoanalysis and cinema In the psychoanalytic literature from which Metz takes his cues, there are two ways to account for this imaginary belief the theory of fetishism and Lacan's theory of the mirror stage Metz puts forward what can only be considered a 'standard theory' of fetishism in 'The imaginary signifier' insofar as he links fetishism with castration anxiety, for, according to Metz's reading of Lacan and Freud, it is the fear of castration that crystallizes all fears of loss Metz's concentration on the notion of castration has the advantage of allowing him to clearly identify what is at stake, even if it does have the disadvantage of putting forward too narrow a theory of fetishism.

14 Metz The imaginary signifier  
p 70

What is at stake in the theory of fetishism is the simultaneous existence of contrary beliefs On the one hand there is a 'primal belief' *all human beings are endowed with a penis*, while on the other hand there is the 'evidence of the senses' *some human beings do not have a penis*<sup>14</sup> What the fetish enables is the coexistence of these contradictory theories so that our fetishist is assured that it is clear and obvious that not all humans have a penis, nonetheless, under certain conditions – the conditions that give rise to the fetish – those who would normally not have a penis may be endowed with one, or at least a substitute that will eradicate the anxiety of the missing penis Hence the structure of the world need not be entirely tragic, for the fetish emerges as a condition of enchantment and redemption.

15 Ibid p 71

16 Ibid p 70

'To sum up', Metz confidently asserts, 'the fetish signifies the penis as absent supplementing it, it puts a "fullness" in place of a lack, but in doing so it affirms that lack'<sup>15</sup> Metz therefore draws a rather complex conclusion What is essential in the theory of fetishism is the existence of a 'doubling up of belief'<sup>16</sup> What the fetish constructs is a logic of representation similar to that sketched above in association with the cinema The fetish is a fiction that is covered over by a fiction the original lack – the 'primal belief' that *all human beings have a penis* – is a fiction that via the mechanism of the fetish is covered over by another fiction – *Yes, all human beings have a penis* Hence a distinction between sublimation and fetishism sublimation hitches onto something in reality in order to alleviate or amend desire – such would be our model of the theatre or the 'traditional' arts – while the fetish displaces reality so as to reroute desire

The fetish covers over a lack of something in reality and it therefore makes this something in reality more psychologically palatable. This is premised on the belief that there is something 'out of joint' or 'lacking' in reality itself and that some things – for example, fetishes – need to be invented or discovered in order to overcome this lack. As Elizabeth Cowie has asserted 'Through the fetish the subject disavows lackingness'.<sup>17</sup>

17 Elizabeth Cowie *Figuring the fetish in Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan 1997) p. 265

So there are two steps in accordance with the 'doubling up of belief': first of all, there is an opening up of a lack which gives rise to traumatic anxiety – the 'lack' in reality gives rise to a 'lackingness' in the subject. This is then followed by the covering over of this lack by way of a fetish. This structure necessarily involves the lack itself – we can say that it is the fetish which motivates or causes the lack – for it is the joy in overcoming the lack that strengthens the fetish. It may therefore be declared that the fetish is both the invention and overcoming of a lack. This can be clarified with reference to a later essay by Metz on fetishism where he claims that films often parade their fetishism by utilizing narratives or techniques that exploit the fundamentally fetishistic relation between spectator and screen.<sup>18</sup> They achieve this by deliberately hiding things from the view of the audience offscreen. Audiences are quite familiar with such scenes in horror movies where the monster will be hidden from view while the terrified gaze of the victim will be the sole object of the camera's focus. The monstrosity of the monster that is offscreen and therefore absent, *lacking*, triggers the anxiety that will subsequently be 'filled in' by its fetishistic representation. And, of course, the display – the *simulated* display – of bodily gore so essential to the horror genre, the mish-mash of blood, guts and slashes, is the very incarnation of the fetish: the fictional performance of violence that alleviates our violent anxiety.

18 Metz 'Photography and fetish' p. 87

However, returning to the strict nature of the filmic signifier for Metz, its fetishistic foundation can be determined. In film 'The spectator does not confound the signifier with the referent' – that is, as I have already stated, there is no discrepancy between the representational process and what is represented – 'she or he knows what a representation is, but nevertheless has a strange feeling of reality (of denial of the signifier)'.<sup>19</sup> And this is where the fetish structure can be located. 'I know very well *that this film is a representation*, but all the same . . . *I shall accept this film as reality*'.

19 *Ibid.* p. 88

How does this view of the cinematic experience relate to the theory of spectatorship that Metz derived from Lacan's notion of the 'mirror stage'? The contradictory unity of the self that results from the mirror stage gives rise to a number of dualities that accentuate the 'split' nature of the Lacanian subject in its imaginary dimension. The illusion of a unified self is nonetheless maintained because of

the subject's belief that it *is* his or her self that is reflected by the mirror. This implants an imaginary status of the subject as fundamentally alienated. The ego is always an alter-ego (even though I must act as though it were not); the self is always founded on a to-ing and fro-ing between self and other.

According to Metz, the cinema spectator does not engage in such a fundamental confusion. The film spectator may be looking at images but he or she does not mistake them for his/her own reflected image. The spectator is absent from the screen, unlike the appearance of self-hood attained in a mirror where one's body appears to be present in the mirror. Metz is clear on this point: 'it is a question of the point occupied by the already constituted ego, occupied during the cinema showing and not in social life in general'.<sup>20</sup> Metz's quite explicit warning here is that we should not have the same expectations for the experience of watching a film as we have for the experiences of everyday life. Metz did not want to place psychoanalytic categories on top of the cinematic experience as if that situation merely replicated the experiences of real social existence. 'The spectator is absent from the screen', declares Metz, so that 'contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object. At the cinema it is always the other who is on the screen, as for me, I am there to look at him'.<sup>21</sup>

Precisely what is Metz claiming here? As an outcome of the mirror stage my self is posed as an other, and my self enters into conflict with this other whom I see reflected in the mirror. This conflict does not occur in the cinema. Rather, I am a further step removed from that sensation of looking in the mirror. Instead of the supposed self of my body setting up a dialectical and alienating antagonism with the other in the mirror, I am, on the contrary, engaged with an other on the screen which is already otherwise than me. In the mirror stage a self is opposed to an other, whereas in the cinema the self disappears and vanishes: the spectator actually becomes *wholly other*, when we are at the cinema we lose the coordinates of selfhood that normally accompany us in everyday life and we take up the existence of something else: a spectator of the cinema.

As a spectator of the cinema I am encouraged to forget the existence of my own self in its bodily form. At the cinema, the antagonism between the 'real' existence of my body and the 'imaginary' existence of my mirror image recedes. My body itself becomes an imaginary entity, a body conceived in terms of an eye (and an ear) that can travel vicariously through the imaginary world of a film where it becomes an anonymous and all-seeing inhabitant. If in 'real life' the alienating split between my real body and its imaginary projection allows me to achieve an identity, then, at the cinema I have only an imaginary body, and this imaginary body can

20 Metz, *The imaginary signifier*, p. 47-8.

21 *Ibid.* p. 48.

take on the shapes and values of the filmic world which it is encouraged to take in. The imaginary is no longer 'out there', opposed to me as in a mirror, for I myself am 'out there', out there in the imaginary realm comprised of the screen and its projections. As a re-invented imaginary entity I am encouraged to explore this other imaginary, that is, I am encouraged to explore the actions and scenes of the film at hand.

Of course, this is precisely the logic that was applied to the distinction between the theatre and the cinema for Metz: the space that my body occupies in the theatre is the same space as that which is occupied by the stage and the actors – the space of the theatre is 'too real' to offer a strong impression of reality.<sup>22</sup> Hence, at the theatre there is a confusion between the imaginary space of the theatrical presentation that I am trying to conjure and the necessary interference my body and its materiality bring to this presentation in exactly the same way as my body impedes the mirror presentation of the mirror stage. In the cinema, on the other hand, everything is raised to the level of the imaginary so that any contradiction between the space that my body occupies and that which the other world of the filmic presentation occupies no longer bears weight. There is no longer a situation in which a self is confused with or opposed to an other, for it is already as an imaginary other that the spectator enters the imaginary presentation of the film.

The question of what this process results in – the question of just *who* the spectator is – is a difficult one. For Metz, the spectator at the cinema is under the illusion or delusion of plenitude, the void, vacuum,<sup>23</sup> empty space or vanishing point<sup>24</sup> that the fetishistic lure of the cinema opens up is also the condition of this void's being filled in and completed by the fetishistic system of projections of cinema's technological apparatus, thus ensuring a self-perpetuating coming-and-going. The cinema promises a subject who is complete and fulfilled in every way, a 'spectator subject' who occupies, for Metz, 'an all-powerful position which is that of God himself, or more broadly of some ultimate signified'.<sup>25</sup> These are analyses, drawn largely from the work of Comolli and Baudry, with which readers should be all too familiar.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to Metz, I would propose a rather different answer to the question of just *who* the spectator is. The spectator at the cinema is one who, far from being 'filled up' by the cinema, is, on the other hand, *emptied of all contents*. The spectator does indeed still identify with himself or herself 'as a pure act of perception',<sup>27</sup> but only insofar as this version of him/herself which is identified is no longer quite what it used to be, for in the cinema this identification may be with anything at all – it will ideally be with wherever the camera takes us, as we flow along with the images before us, unencumbered by the clumsiness (or otherwise) of our own bodies.

At its boldest, such an argument may lead to the claim that the act

22 Metz 'The impression of reality' p. 10

23 J. Leirrens *Le cinéma et le temps* (1954) quoted in Metz 'The impression of reality' p. 10

24 Metz 'The imaginary signifier' p. 49

25 Ibid.

26 See Jean-Louis Comolli 'Technique and ideology: camera perspective, depth of field' in Bill Nichols (ed.) *Movies and Methods* Volume II (Berkeley and Los Angeles: CA University of California Press, 1985) pp. 40–57. Jean-Louis Baudry 'Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus' in *Ibid.* pp. 531–42.

27 Ibid.

of watching a film does not require one to have a body. What would be the consequences of such a loss of body? If, according to the logic of the mirror stage, identity is comprised by way of the dialectic between one's body and one's mirror image, then it follows that, if one loses one's body, then one also loses one's identity, or at the very least, an integral ingredient to the recipe of identity. In other words, the cinema spectator, the 'cinematic subject', may be posited as a subject without an identity. And surely this makes up one of the magnificent joys of going to the cinema: anonymity. Watching the cinema screen could almost be classed as a reversal of the mirror stage: if one gains identity by way of the mirror, then one loses it by looking at the cinema screen.

However such an argument would be overstating the case somewhat, for one certainly does not go back to an existence that is prior to the mirror stage, and neither is one's body or identity erased. All of the cognitive faculties, those of spatio-temporal reassurance and also those personal beliefs or prejudices that amount to a 'personality', are still there when one watches a film. In the exchange that occurs in the cinema, quite contrary to what occurs in front of the mirror, my identity is not *at stake*, my actions and my thoughts do not have consequences that are replicated by the events on the cinema screen (and vice-versa). In a sense, when I begin watching a film I am already going outside of myself, already 'becoming other', in as much as this is a necessary requirement for a film to impose its imaginary effects.

Many readers will no doubt be inclined to entirely dismiss the claim that one loses a sense of bodiliness at the cinema (and further claim that the worst excesses of the idealist theory of cinema have been revisited). It is on this point, however, that the nature of Metz's idealist theory of spectatorship can gain a hitherto unforeseen level of clarity. While watching a film the spectator does not lose the awareness of his/her body for the *entire* duration of a film. Indeed, it is more than likely only at rare moments that one has such 'out of body' experiences, the rare moments when, during the watching of a film, there is a synergy between what is presented on the screen and what is amenable to the most convincing levels of the spectator's beliefs. And such moments are, quite literally, *gaps in the viewing experience*, they are moments of imaginary phantasmagoria, of unconscious perception, of a degree of hyper-perceptive hallucination where one unshakeably *believes* in the reality of the screen world in which one is engrossed. In such cases one could also clearly argue that the body acts in unconscious ways and that the sense of a loss of bodiliness that I am trying to describe is actually more of a loss of self-consciousness – for example, the loss of the awareness that one is sitting in a movie theatre – or a loss of 'self-theorization'. For Metz, these moments are the moments when the imaginary signifier is successful and they are the moments to which

the classical narrative cinema 'aspired (and still aspires, I would argue)

The experience of watching a film will always take place along the trajectory of the opposing poles of 'self' and 'other' at one pole – the pole of 'otherness' – there is a spectator who is completely swept up in and carried away by the film, the spectator who is completely lost in the film. This would be an ideal moment of cinema's imaginary signifier, where what is upon the screen completely eclipses any consciousness I have of the world's immediate existence, for example, any awareness that I am sitting in a darkened room watching projections of light. This is not to say that such a spectator is *unaware*. On the contrary, such a spectator is in a state of hyper-awareness, so captivating are the images it beholds. But such an awareness is not the awareness of a consciousness that will reduce what it sees to a body of knowledge, to an introspection relatable to one's self. Such an experience is backed up by Metz's immortal phrase, 'A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand' because it is so easy to be drawn into a film, sometimes we are not quite sure just what it is that we have experienced and it is difficult to convey just what it is that we have been through.<sup>28</sup> Some would call this the 'magic' or 'wonder' of which cinema is capable. These are the kinds of experiences Metz was trying to describe by calling upon the notion of cinema's imaginary signifier.

At the other pole is the spectator who totally rejects what is projected in front of him/her. And this certainly happens. To deny that it happens is to deny the conditions of the cinematic experience, to deny the fact that sometimes we see films that we do not like, that sometimes we may think more about how uncomfortable the seats are, or that the screen is too small, or the fact that we may start day-dreaming and leave the world of the film altogether. To quote Metz in full:

Whatever the psychical paths that produce it, filmic unpleasure is a thing that exists: certain spectators do not like certain films. The fiction cinema, which in principle caters to the phantasy, can also thwart it: one person might not have imagined heroes of the particular physiognomy or stature that the screen offers to his perception and that he cannot retouch, he is secretly annoyed that the plot does not take the course he hoped for; he 'doesn't see things that way'. Those spectators whom the intellectual (unaware, all too often, of the limitations of his own species) considers naive do not hesitate to say that they dislike a film because it ends badly or because it is too bold, too unfeeling, too sad, etc., if they were any more ingenuous they would tell us quite clearly that the film is bad 'because the two brothers should have been able to

<sup>28</sup> Metz, 'The cinema: language or language-system?' in *Film Language* p. 72.

understand each other and be reconciled' (these are only random examples, but many conversations about films are of this order, even the majority if we consider the population of spectators as a whole).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Metz 'The fiction film and its spectator: a metapsychological study', in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* p. 112

This passage reflects the concrete nature of Metz's theories. we don't like certain films because they do not appear to us in the way we would have liked. Inasmuch as films can give rise to a wondrous fantasy world that flows from cinema's imaginary signifier, they can also destroy our fantasies, and this often results in the decree that such a film is a 'bad' film. Metz's claims here put to rest the allegation that his theory presents a 'hegemonic and totalizing model' or that 'the variability of spectator response remains unaccounted for'.<sup>30</sup> Rather than closing down, restricting or totalizing audience responses, Metz's delineations offer a far wider and freer range of responses than any other theory of spectatorship I have come across. Traditional theories of spectatorship – from Eisenstein to, say, Tom Gunning – have tried to emphasize the way in which by presenting *x* on screen a film will elicit response *y* in the audience, that certain filmic constructions will automatically lead to predictable spectatorial reactions.<sup>31</sup> Metz, on the other hand, comes up with a theory that is infinitely variable, a theory that is entirely dependent upon the predilections and desires of the individual audience members, even on the mood or frame of mind such individuals are in when they see a particular film. What stimulates the response of the imaginary signifier in *me* may leave *you* totally unmoved (hence the reason different people respond differently to the same film). Therefore, cinema will at times present a 'good object' and at other times a 'bad object', but, as in the Kleinian theory, these objects are not prescribed or determined in advance, rather, they are dependent on the vagaries of the flow of subjective experience.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake *Film Theory: an Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) p. 90. The authors attribute the claim of a hegemonic and totalizing model to David Rodowick (see *The Difficulty of Difference: Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference and Film Theory* [New York: Routledge, 1991] p. 18). While Rodowick does make this claim, his targets are more explicitly Raymond Bellour, Jean-Louis Baudry and others. Indeed Rodowick later claims that Metz insists that neither the form of the narrative film nor the context of reception can determine this experience [of filmic fantasy] p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *The montage of film attractions*, *Writings 1922–1934* ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Bloomington: IN: Indiana University Press, 1988) pp. 39–58; Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', *Art & Text* no. 34 (Spring 1989) pp. 31–45.

<sup>32</sup> See Metz's comments on 'The imaginary and the "good object" in the cinema and in the theory of the cinema' in *The Imaginary Signifier* pp. 3–16.

<sup>33</sup> Metz 'The imaginary signifier' p. 72.

In these moments when the film becomes a bad object, the imaginary signifier is deprived of validity. As Metz declares:

It is understood that the audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion. It 'knows' that the screen presents no more than fiction. And yet, it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scrupulously respected (or else the fiction film is declared to be 'poorly made'), that everything is set to work to make the deception effective and to give an air of truth (this is the problem of verisimilitude). Any spectator will tell you 'he doesn't believe it', but everything happens as if there were nonetheless someone to be deceived, someone who really would 'believe in it'.<sup>33</sup>

This is still an extraordinarily powerful discourse: we have all heard people declare, 'It was only a movie'. In other words, we know that what goes on in a film really is just projections of light on a screen.

that the diegetic action is not really happening. And yet, at the same time, we must believe that it is indeed occurring right there in front of us, or else, quite simply, the film does not make sense. This is, of course, the kind of attitude associated with the classical fiction cinema, but it is nonetheless an extremely influential mode of thinking that still conditions the way spectators approach films, even those who believe themselves to be above such pettiness will more often than not fall prey to it when they encounter a film they don't like – the film will push beyond the limits of their terms of what makes sense. And how does a film not make 'sense'? I am certainly guilty of regularly using phrases like, 'it was just too unbelievable', or 'the plot was too implausible', or, 'the film was good until the point where he made that miraculous escape – but we all know he couldn't possibly have escaped, and that just ruined the film for me because it no longer fitted together'. Of course, a film does not have to be at all realistic in order to be believable, but for much of the time a film must be believable above all else.

So finally what is it that enables this believability? In opposition to Metz, I have argued that the cinema apparatus does not give rise to a mode of spectatorship that desires self-mastery nor to a masterful subject, but rather that cinema spectatorship divorces the spectator from the framework of subjectivity and delivers him/her into the arms of the other. But what is the other? How do we account for this otherness? In opposition to conceiving of the spectator–subject in terms of its desire for mastery, in terms of its desire for overcoming and mastering its other, I have argued that the cinema spectator puts in place the possibility for an overcoming of 'self-ness' – the experience of being engrossed in a film entails the negation of a self that is reducible to the terms of a totalizing self-mastery, the cinema gives rise to a loss of self. Indeed, one could speculate that for the spectator at the cinema it is the self itself that is 'lacking' – the self emerges as 'lackingness'. That is to say, the self itself becomes a fetish.

It could be possible that the problem of the mirror stage has re-emerged – the self is itself a fetish that covers over its own otherness. However, as Metz stresses, what is on the cinema screen is never a mirage of the self, the screen is never a mirror. As Jacqueline Rose, Joan Copjec and others have argued, the spectator's relationship to what is on the cinema screen may have more in common with the experience Lacan described in terms of the 'gaze'.<sup>34</sup> As a result there can be no return of the self to itself because there is no 'self' up there on the screen to begin with. The experience, rather, has more in common with a divorcing of the self from itself than a fulfilling return of the self to wholeness.

So while cinema spectatorship certainly has the look of fetishism, it is in fact an inverted fetishism. In traditional accounts of cinema spectatorship – in Metz's account, and even in recent accounts by

<sup>34</sup> Jacqueline Rose 'The imaginary and The cinematic apparatus: problems in current theory' in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986) pp. 167–214. Joan Copjec, 'The orthopsychic subject: film theory and the reception of Lacan' in *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) pp. 15–38.

35 Elizabeth Cowie *Representing the Woman* Laura Mulvey *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: British Film Institute 1996)

36 Octave Mannoni *Je sais bien mais quand même* in *Clefs pour l'imaginaire de l'autre scène* (Paris: Seuil 1969) cf Slavoj Žižek *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso 1991) pp 245–9

37 Metz 'The cinema language or language system?' p 73

Laura Mulvey and Elizabeth Cowie<sup>35</sup> – the self is fetishized on the basis of its being returned to itself (and thus cinematic fetishism is still interpreted as a 'negative' instance of cinema spectatorship associated with the classical cinema). This perspective can be outlined with reference to Octave Mannoni's account of fetishism: 'I know very well . . . that "*I am an other*" . . . but all the same . . . I will believe that "*I am myself*".'<sup>36</sup>

This interpretation, if we accept the precepts of Lacan's mirror stage, is also the kind of self-interpretation that accompanies us in our day-to-day existence – the coherence of the self is a fabrication, but a necessary one which ensures that 'I' can have meaningful relationships with other people and assume a degree of self-understanding.

Against this, the cinematic interpretation I am trying to put forward begins from this very assumption of self-hood in our everyday lives – it begins with the assertion that I am indeed myself when I sit down in a seat at the cinema theatre. However, strange things happen when the film starts to roll – the terms of the relationship between spectator and screen become the direct opposite of those posited above – 'I know very well . . . that "*I am myself*" but all the same . . . I will believe that "*I am an other*".'

These conclusions cannot be seen as anything other than preliminary. From here it would seem paramount to clarify what actually occurs by way of the sensation that 'I am an other', for this 'other' would be none other than the 'stuff' of the unconscious (or would it?). From this point, the question that must be asked is: how do films act upon, intrude into, engage with, or transform the unconscious? While it is clear that much of the process of perceiving a film falls to conscious thought – the blunt determinations of 'what happens', of who the characters are, and so on – it is nevertheless true that a great proportion of what is presented on the screen passes us by, there is quite simply too much 'in the cinema the units of signification that are present together in the image are too numerous and too continuous even the most intelligent viewer cannot discern them all'.<sup>37</sup> This would leave room for what evades the determinations of consciousness, but which would nonetheless have unconscious repercussions. These unconscious residues would, it seems to me, be as fundamental to the filmic experience as those things to which we can consciously point. To repeat Metz's claim 'A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand', and it is not what is easy to explain in a film that fascinates us, that moves us and enthuses us. In short, it is not our *understanding* that is impressed by a film. Rather, it is precisely what we cannot explain or understand, or what we find difficult to explain, that enables a film to work its 'magic'.

# An Act of transition: empire and the making of a national British film industry, 1927

PRIYA JAIKUMAR

In recent years, there have been groundbreaking studies of the implications of imperial expansion and imperial technologies of control upon the evolution of British society, state and culture<sup>1</sup>. There has been less interest in the question of what it meant to be an empire in the twentieth century, when imperial self-perception, self-definition and self-projection encountered the reality of political and economic impotence. Economic arguments about the declining profitability of empire for the British nation after the late 1800s and the reduced viability of formal colonization during the rise of finance capitalism and indirect economic imperialism<sup>2</sup> have further justified this neglect. However, decolonization radically disrupted the identity of the imperial state in that it fundamentally altered Britain's premiss for bartering with other advanced industrial nations. In film, Britain's attempted mobilization of a disappearing market makes manifest the imperial nation's complex set of responses to a global shift in the (political, economic, moral) terms of international trade and powerbrokerage. For instance, imagining the potential of colonial markets to generate revenue for British films encouraged certain definitions of the British film industry to emerge over others. As the difficulties in harvesting those colonial and dominion markets became more evident, the British state introduced changes in its conceptualization of film as a national product. British cinema – as a commodity subject to state regulation and as a cultural artefact involved in the production of a national image – registered

<sup>1</sup> Literature and anthropology have been the primary source of such work. Indexical texts include Edward Said *Cultural and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Bernard S. Cohn *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); essays in Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (eds) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Lance E. Davis and Robert E. Huttenback *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: the Political Economy of the British Empire 1860–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

predominant concerns about the dissolution of empire. This is not to repeat the undeniable observation that empire became a nostalgic symbol of Britain's past. It is to argue that close attention to film regulations (and commercial film texts, not discussed here) gives us access to the imperial state's renegotiated identity in an era of decolonization.

Britain in the 1930s, still a sovereign power among its dominions, colonies and protectorates, was also home to a film industry that was incapacitated by Hollywood's imperial practices. In the following, frequently quoted passage, the trade journal *World Film News* makes effortless allusions to the British as a 'colonial people' with respect to their 'native' film industry, reproducing a dominant awareness that Britain was being victimized by Hollywood in the manner of its own legacy of exploitation.

The Americans, with impressive supply of Hollywood pictures, have the necessary tank power to put native [British] exhibitors to their mercy. They are using it remorselessly. . . *So far as films go, we are now a colonial people*<sup>3</sup>

3 Britain's *World Film News* vol. 2 no. 8 (1937) p. 5. Emphasis mine.

To the imperial state witnessing an effluence of widely popular films from Hollywood and strongly nationalistic films from interwar Germany and Italy, the correlation between an established base of film production and a strong international presence seemed great, and the stakes of representation high. Panic about the dismal condition of British films found its voice in Sir Stephen Tallents, Secretary of Britain's Empire Marketing Board, when he said of cinema: 'No civilised country can today afford either to neglect the projection of its national personality, or to resign its projection to others. Least of all countries can England afford either that neglect or that resignation.'<sup>4</sup> Why England, 'least of all'? Evidently, the British film industry's domination by Hollywood was all the more troublesome because Britain's cinematographic subjugation was located within an expectation of pre-eminence and of unchallenged access to markets.

4 Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932) pp. 11–12.

5 See Roy Armes, *A Critical History of the British Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Michael Chanan, *The Dream That Kicks* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: the Film Industry and the Government 1927–84* (London: British Film Institute, 1985); Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Rachel Low, *Filmmaking in 1930s Britain* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985); Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930–39* (London: Routledge, 1984).

European film history, frequently a stranger to empire studies as a disciplinary field, has told us fragmented parts of the story. We know that the British state extended special protection within its domestic market for a national product – the 'British film' – in order to combat Hollywood's imperial practices in film distribution and exhibition (as will be described further).<sup>5</sup> What is left untold in this account is the extent to which Britain's regulations were also testimonials to changing power relations within the British Empire. The British state's national and international negotiations to strengthen its commercial film industry must be understood in the context of its experience of a *colonizer* being 'colonized'. Consolidating this argument, I shall demonstrate that the British state's first intervention in the nation's film industry, with the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927, was governed by an effort to gain

economic access to colonial and dominion markets, despite the emergence of circumstances that rendered such economic alternatives untenable. In fact, the frustration of British attempts to deploy the inter-imperial market defined the subsequent form of film regulation. Here it is worth recalling that, in more ways than one, 1927 signaled an official attempt at acknowledging and regularizing shifts in politico-economic relations which required the British state to explicitly redefine the British 'nation'. A year prior to the Cinematograph Act under discussion, resolutions passed at the significant 'Imperial Conference' of 1926 introduced wide-ranging changes within the empire, as the term 'commonwealth' replaced 'empire' and more territories were given concessions towards self-representation and self-rule.<sup>6</sup> Such gestures did not constitute a mere shrugging-off of empire. As this brief narrative on film shows, Britain's regulation of its cinema as a national commodity in 1927 was the construct of a state attempting to compensate for its growing vulnerabilities. It was also the product of a state in the habit of authority, asserting the only form of control possible within a transforming powerscape.

Britain's protection of its commercial cinema – that newly acknowledged ambassador of the nation – makes an ideal locus to study the manner in which imperial terms were in part jettisoned and in part rearticulated during the late 1920s, as the British state reinvented itself and its film industry for a new era of negotiations. Here is an instance of what Benedict Anderson has called the empire's 'inventive legerdemain' as it reproduced itself in 'national drag'.<sup>7</sup> However, the singularity of this moment in exposing the impracticality of the British Empire and its adaptability to a new world order should not be overstated. For instance, if we ask (in the phraseology of juvenile riddles) 'when is an empire not an empire?', the answer would be that British imperialism was never free of contradictions, partly because its principle of unfettered expansionism laid bare 'the way universal claims [of British liberalism] were bound up in particularist assertions'.<sup>8</sup> Anderson, Hannah Arendt and Gyan Prakash, among others, have argued that the 'inner incompatibility' of empire and nation was the lesson of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in particular, when nations emerged at the core of empires to be linked in paradoxical, constitutive and interruptive relationships to each other.<sup>9</sup> Of course, industries also arose at the core of empire with variable investments in colonial markets. What is specific to the British film industry of the 1920s is that the imperial state had to appease not only its own film producers who sought domestic British and colonial film markets, but also colonies and dominions that sought sovereign film industries, and the USA which sought nothing less than continued British compliance to Hollywood's terms. The British state had to contend with an emerging nexus of power relations particular to the

6 Arthur Eggar and G. R. Rajagopaul, *The Laws of India and Burma* Part III (Calcutta: Butterworth & Co., 1929), pp. 1–2, 10.

7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), p. 87.

8 Stoler and Cooper, *Tensions of Empire*, pp. 2–3.

9 See Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966); Gyan Prakash, 'Who's afraid of postcoloniality?' *Social Text*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1996), pp. 187–202.

twentieth century as it faced industrial and political lobbying for (*and against*) the protection of British film production at home, the rise of nationalist movements and nationalist consciousness within the empire, and the growing strength of the USA (enhanced by its control of war reparation funds) Intervening in its film industry was a complicated manoeuvre for an imperial state that attempted to pursue protectionist laws in order to counter its film industry's subservience to Hollywood (without offending the Americans) as well as mobilize the imperial market by proposing trade privileges for British commodities (without provoking the colonial populace) What emerges at this time is a suspect – that is, an *interested* – shift from the language of coercion to a language of reciprocity in the British state's imperial negotiations

Prior to the Cinematograph Act or Quota Act of 1927, the British government's involvement with films pertained to taxation, censorship and the regulation of cinematograph theaters<sup>10</sup> As the state's inaugural venture into film protectionism, I find two aspects of the Quota Act of 1927 to be vividly descriptive of contemporaneous pressures One is the manner in which the attempted wooing of colonial and dominion markets defined the terminology of the Act. Within the Act of 1927, British films are referred to as 'British Empire films' and the definition of the term 'empire' is kept strategically vague The definition of 'British Empire films' changes in an amendment to the Quota Act to accommodate, as I argue, a shift in the perceived benefits provided by the inter-imperial markets to the British nation. This altered terminology incorporates prevalent and tactical ambiguities in the constructs of nation and empire, manifesting all the mess and method of the transition in Britain's officially represented identity. British documents from the late 1920s relating to cinematography utilize the concept of 'empire' to carry some of its archaic significance of being a national prerogative of the imperial nation, and also some of its emerging sense of becoming an international community Occasionally, the Empire serves as a signifier of Britain's overseas resources, where owning up to a vulnerable film industry appears tantamount to confessing to a compromised nation-state and an ineffectual administration At other times, it is an awkward term in need of revision The evasiveness surrounding discussions of film regulation catches the state's definition of a national commodity, and by extension its definition of itself, in the act of transition Studying these uncomfortable moments prevents, in Foucault's cinematic metaphor, the surrender of history to 'a play of fixed images disappearing in turn',<sup>11</sup> where a commonwealth of nations appears suddenly to replace an empire without any perceptible impact on Britain. Thus official definitions of a national commodity, desired and unforeseen uses of regulatory terminology, subsequent amendments and surrounding debates, all serve as the very chronicle of a change.

10 See Simon Hartog 'State protection of a beleaguered industry' in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds) *British Cinema History* (Totowa NJ: Barnes and Noble 1983) pp 59–73

11 Michel Foucault *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* trans A M Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books 1972) pp 167, 166

The second aspect of the Quota Act that I discuss as an index of the crisis in imperial state identity is the debate between the three sectors of the film industry (namely, the British producers, renters and exhibitors) around the issue of protectionism. During this period, each of the three sectors represented their competing commercial stakes in film as protective of national interests in order to elicit – and in some cases to avoid – state intervention. Detailing the internal dissension of the British film industry is significant as a corrective to any cultural account that makes too easy an assessment of an entire nation's (or, more accurately in this case, an entire commercial industry's) investment in empire. That which was reified in the British state's Act of 1927 represented a small but politically powerful sliver of Britain's film industry. The Quota Act's terminology as well as the industrial debates surrounding protectionism, both of which are discussed in detail in this essay, are descriptive of the imperial state's activities within national boundaries. But while an examination of the Act proves that the state's regulation was guided by a notion of Britain's sovereign position within its empire, a study of the industrial debates surrounding the Act demonstrates that the national British film industry thus constructed was a factionalized entity within itself.

The 'British Empire film' is a confusing, changeling term that appears in various documents surrounding the regulation of British cinema in the 1920s. It is a term that is used to refer to British films made with empire resources and, quite contrarily, it is also employed to describe films produced by colonies and dominions. Such a slippage became necessary and possible within a context in which empire markets gained a contemporary significance, in that they acquired a symbolic and material relevance to Britain's experience of domination by Hollywood. The notion of British Empire films, as it evolved during this period, appears to address a peculiar dilemma that British film producers and the British state were confronting: the creation of a distinctive national identity for film that could also earn their films an international viability. For instance, a report from 1932 evaluates the aims of state protectionism in British cinema and makes a sophisticated argument regarding the dangers of providing special concessions for domestic films in a nation whose boundaries were being undermined by the forces of international media. Simultaneously, the report warns against domestic media products aimed primarily at international audiences. The search for a successful common denominator, it is feared, might compromise the cultural vocabulary of the national mythmakers. Thus

a narrow and uninformed nationalism controlling at home a foreign competition with which abroad it is unable to compete, is sterile

Broadcasting, like photography, has done much to break down the barriers between nations; the film can do more than either. A self-conscious internationalism, however, would defeat its own ends. A film which has been designed to be international is rarely a work of art or good entertainment.<sup>12</sup>

12 *The Film in National Life* (London: George Allen and Unwin 1932) p. 7

Proposals for organizing the British film industry passed within this context imagined British Empire films and empire markets to be avenues out of 'narrow and uninformed nationalism' as well as 'self-conscious internationalism', endowing British films with qualities of flexibility and versatility primarily associated with Hollywood.

The successful international distribution and reception of Hollywood films had reinforced the idea that their narrative and visual content carried a type of cosmopolitanism and universal appeal against which competing cinemas had to mobilize a domestic allure to win back national audiences. As film scholar Stephen Crofts points out, the predominance of Hollywood films in the world film markets since 1919 made them familiar to a variety of cultures, with American economic interests defining the shape of several national industries and Hollywood's aesthetic becoming a global phenomenon. Crofts observes that 'Hollywood is hardly ever spoken of as a national cinema, perhaps indicating its transnational reach'.<sup>13</sup> In the late 1920s, Britain's presumed commercial proximity to its imperial territories appeared to be its opportunity for access to an exclusive base of audience and appeal. The empire promised a cosmopolitanism to which only the British nation could lay claim, thus trading simultaneously on Britain's national and international edge over Hollywood. With very little definitional negotiation, the idea of empire could represent the strengths of the British nation combined with the advantages of transnationalism, which was a significant manoeuvre given the reputation and global presence of Hollywood films. If we examine the manner in which discussions relating to empire markets were framed, this may be observed at a syntactical as well as a conceptual level. (It may be recalled here that while inter-imperial relations were not strictly international or transnational in that they did not involve relations between sovereign nation-states but relations between territories under varying forms of governance dominated by a supreme nation-state, the breakdown of this empire and its replacement with the notion of a commonwealth was imminent. This is reflected in the slipperiness of official uses of the term 'empire' that are followed in this essay.)

13 Stephen Crofts  
Reconceptualizing national  
cinema/s *Quarterly Review of  
Film and Video* vol. 14, no. 3  
(1993), p. 50

We may take, as an initial example, a memorandum presented in 1925 by the influential Federation of British Industries (the FBI) to Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister (President, British Board of Trade). This memorandum, which served as a preliminary argument for government intervention to protect British films, contains recommendations 'to revive production', with several specific

14 The text of this two-page memorandum titled 'To revive production' FBI's summary of the rival plans is reprinted in *Kinematograph Weekly* (6 August 1925) pp. 30-31. All citations refer to these pages.

mentions of 'Empire films' and 'Empire subjects'.<sup>14</sup> The memorandum proposes two types of strategies to the government for the creation of an assisted market and for increasing capital for the production and exhibition of British films. First, the memorandum suggests protectionist measures, many of which were adopted in the British Cinematograph Act of 1927. In contrast to such recommendations which may be characterized as restrictive legislations, the memorandum also calls for the creation of organizations such as a 'finance company' and a 'national studio' to generate sustained funding and production centres for British films. The name 'Imperial Cinematograph Corporation Ltd' is volunteered for the proposed finance company. Defending the choice, the memorandum hopes that 'consent for the use of the word "Imperial" would no doubt be granted by the Board of Trade'.

Within this document, as in other documents of the time, there is a notable sensitivity towards the use of the term 'Imperial', which is used interchangeably with the term 'National'. More specifically, 'Empire' and 'Imperial' are primarily used to refer to that which expands or enhances domestic British resources. The designation of a finance company involved in 'preparing and arranging for the production of films on Empire subjects' includes recommendations that this series of films combine 'real entertainment value' while exploiting 'the marvellous and varied resources of the Empire'. The FBI requests:

More generous Government facilities by way of permits for the use of public buildings, H M forces (Sea, Land, Air), Fire Brigades, Parks, etc., for scenes in approved productions and the appropriation of a part of any funds provided towards making of a series of films with purely Empire interest.

The memorandum places films with an 'Empire interest' in a category distinct from the 'film Scenarios suitable for production in National interests.' With such categories, British films are constructed as entities capable of working for empire interests on the one hand and for national interests on the other, endowing them with a certain dual dexterity. In them, the idea of empire is used to convey a breadth to which only Britain could lay claim, uninhibited by narrow boundaries as the territorial and visual scope of the empire demonstrated the very largesse of Britain's national theatre of performance. Albeit an unrealizable advantage by this time, references to 'empire' operationalized Britain's national and cosmopolitan edge over competing nation-states.

This argument has a larger scope. Briefly, if the empire promised resources broader than the 'narrowly national', as a cinematic locale and theme it demonstrated Britain's national triumph. Films depicting British adventures in colonies and dominions can be seen as the cinematic equivalent of industrial strategizing to exploit imperial

reserves for film, in that they also utilized a familiar overseas resource to which Britain perceived a prior claim. A mundane example of this, which makes an oddly frequent appearance in discussions of the film industry, is the weather of the British Isles. The advantages of locating outdoor shoots for British films in the empire were discussed in both the houses of Parliament. To quote one exchange from the House of Commons in 1927

Mr Harris This country is handicapped by its climate One of the reasons of the immense success of the American films is that they have many months of dry sunshine in which plays can be produced in the open air

Viscount Sandon What about the rest of the Empire?

Mr Harris That is one of the ways we can get over the handicap<sup>15</sup>

15 *Parliamentary Debates Commons* fifth ser vol 203 (1927) col 2103 Similar questions were raised at the House of Lords by Earl Beauchamp *Parliamentary Debates Lords* fifth ser vol 61 (1925) col 291

16 *The Film in National Life* p 126

17 For another discussion of cosmopolitanism in national cinemas in the context of the British and US film industry, see Michael Walsh *Fighting American invasion with cricket, roses and marmalade for breakfast The Velvet Light Trap* no 40 (Fall 1997) pp 3–17

Productions with imperial themes became prolific in a context within which it was commonplace to emphasize that 'no single country can offer to cinematography so fruitful a field as the British Empire'<sup>16</sup> In more ways than one, then, the notion of an Empire film epitomized the British attempt at achieving a synthesis of national narratives with cosmopolitan cachet and may be understood as one of Britain's responses to the extensive access and reach of Hollywood<sup>17</sup> With this sense of the British Empire film as invested with a unique cosmopolitanism for the British state, I examine the flurry of administrative and legislative paperwork surrounding the Cinematograph Act of 1927, also called the Quota Act. Notably, under this Act the state extended its protection to a commodity defined not as a British film but as a film of the British Empire

According to the Quota Act of 1927, prior to their exhibition within Britain all films needed to be registered as 'British' or 'Foreign' with the British Board of Trade, and unregistered films were not allowed exhibition. Most controversially, the Act required renters to acquire, and film exhibitors to show, a prescribed number of British films. This 'quota' of British films was to increase on a sliding scale, beginning at 7.5 per cent for the renters and five per cent for the exhibitors in 1927. By 1936, when the Act was to be reviewed, twenty per cent of all films rented and exhibited within Britain were to be 'British' films.

Thus the Act necessitated state-defined criteria for identifying a British film. Some of the requirements for a film to qualify as British were as follows:

the film had to be made by a British subject or a British company, the studio scenes had to be shot in a studio in the British Empire, unless the Board of Trade authorized otherwise, the author of the original scenario on which the film was based

18 Taken from *The Bioscope*  
17 March 1927 p 50

had to be a British subject, seventy-five per cent of the wages had to be paid to British subjects or to domiciles of the British Empire<sup>18</sup>

According to this Act, then, *every film made within the empire and by a British subject was to count as 'British'* By definition, this included films from the dominions and colonies, which could now be eligible for the quota within Britain

As revealed by successive events, this inclusion was made because Britain hoped for reciprocal arrangements from the various colonial and dominion states The preferential treatment supposedly provided to films from dominions and colonies was claimed as grounds for a similar ingress for British films into imperial markets The strategy – of suggesting reciprocal exchanges of vaguely defined 'British Empire films' between Britain and the rest of the empire – is part of a longer story about Britain and Hollywood

Prior to the 1920s, domestic film production in Britain had languished while its distribution and exhibition sectors had benefited from the popularity of Hollywood films The dictates of profit and of booking contracts had impelled British renters and exhibitors to distribute and to run Hollywood films in preference to British ones. A dramatic signpost of this crisis in production came in November 1924, also called 'Black November', when every studio in Britain remained dark in the absence of any domestic filmmaking Britain's Quota Act of 1927 was passed in this context to assist the production sector of the film industry The stirrings within the film industry were of a piece with events in several other British industries during the interwar period when, initiated by increasing competition from other advanced industrial nations, imperial policies were realigned to make the empire a self-sufficient economic unit<sup>19</sup> The 1920s and 1930s witnessed an increase in organizations that attempted to coax the overseas markets of the empire to come 'alive' as a way of strengthening the British position amongst its rivals.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, when British film producers succeeded in getting representation with the FBI, their appeal to the British government emphasized the 'Value of The Empire Markets'

In considering the various ways in which to counteract the great advantage held by the American producing companies through their possession of so large and wealthy a market, attention has been given to the possibilities of improving the position of British pictures in British overseas markets<sup>21</sup>

As a consequence of FBI pressure on the British Board of Trade, the following resolution was adopted at the Imperial Conference of 1926

The Imperial Conference, recognizing that it is of the greatest importance that a larger and increasing proportion of the films

19 See Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914–1940* (London F Cass, 1984) John Kent *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944–49* (London Leicester University Press 1993) John M MacKenzie (ed.) *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (London Manchester University Press 1986)

20 To bring the Empire alive was the explicit goal of the Empire Marketing Board See Stephen Constantine's essay in *Imperialism and Popular Culture* pp 192–231

21 From a memorandum attached to an FBI letter to the government titled: Cooperative marketing of British Empire films FBI offer to government 10 November 1926, ref no 300/JJ/11 np

exhibited throughout the Empire should be of Empire production, commends the matter and the remedial measures proposed to the consideration of the Governments of various parts of the Empire<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *The Film in National Life* p 129

The statement went on to assure the various governments of the empire that the home government would take a lead in introducing 'remedial measures' within Britain, including custom duties on foreign (that is, non-empire) films, preference for the free entry of films made within the empire, and the imposition of requirements to rent and exhibit a minimum percentage of empire films.<sup>23</sup> The 1927 Act was passed against the backdrop of such a resolution, and its passage enabled Britain to recommend to dominion and colonial governments that they consider similar measures within their territories, to 'encourage the exhibition of Empire films'<sup>24</sup> Though final resolutions passed at the Imperial Conference of 1926 did not go beyond stating that governments of different parts of the empire take 'early and effective action'<sup>25</sup> to support empire films, a series of events subsequent to this conference show that Britain's suggestions, however mild, did produce consequences. In Canada, provincial legislatures proposed a screen quota for empire-produced films, with the British Columbia legislature taking the lead in 1929<sup>26</sup> A bipartisan Cinematograph Committee was set up in India in 1927–8, and one of its aims was to assess the possibility of creating imperial preference within the Indian market ('Imperial preference' in this case would have meant creating a protected market within the subcontinent for films made in Britain and other parts of the empire by extending them some kind of preferential treatment) As discussed later, for a variety of reasons these measures did not eventually result in any special privileges for British films, but it remains significant that such efforts were encouraged and pursued as far as possible

<sup>23</sup> *Report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927–1928* (Calcutta: Government of India Publication 1928) p 10

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* p xii

<sup>25</sup> *The Film in National Life* p 129

<sup>26</sup> Manjunath Pendakur *Canadian Dreams and American Control: the Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990)

So far, the rather simplistic and leveling reference to an 'empire market' has served as a heuristic device in this essay, permitting me to emphasize the extent to which the documents under consideration frequently conflated the British Empire with the British nation, British colonies with British dominions, and British India with British Africa, utilizing a vagueness that bears closer analysis. As this example from a report on the Quota Act of 1927 demonstrates, various dominions and colonies were subsumed under the idea of an empire market that was potentially available to Britain

In order that British producers may be able to compete on equal terms [with the US], it is essential that all steps possible to increase the market available to British films should be taken. Outside this country an increase in the market in the Empire overseas is the most obvious outlet.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Cinematograph Films Act 1927: Report of a Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office 1936) p 10. Also known as the Moyne Committee Report

This sentiment is echoed in various documents of the 1920s and 1930s

The British [film] industry needs a larger market within which to extend its scope. The British Empire is an obvious field, but it is untitled. Distribution is largely controlled by American capital. The British industry has a legitimate and encouraging opportunity to enlarge its field; but it is an opportunity which must be courageously seized, and without delay.<sup>28</sup>

28 *The Film in National Life* p. 48

A singular irony underlies the representation of the empire as one market, and as 'an obvious' market, that could assist Britain in the face of Hollywood domination. First, territories within the British Empire put up different forms of resistance to the passage of any legislation to facilitate the entry of British films. Further, as the FBI was well aware, even if Britain *had* succeeded in the acquisition of empire markets for British films, this would still not have put Britain on a par with Hollywood.

Despite this foreknowledge, Britain defined a national industry within the framework of imperial aspirations primarily because references to an undifferentiated empire made operational the only kind of imperial power available to Britain, in terms of its film industry. The amendment to the Quota Act of 1927 clarifies this, in that hidden agendas of the previous Act stand out in relief. In 1927, the Quota Act could afford to extend legislative protection to films produced in British India and British Africa because such films posed no threat to British films within the domestic British market. As most members of the Indian film industry interviewed by the Indian Cinematograph Committee well recognized, the inclusion of empire films in the British Quota Act (still a Bill when the Indian Committee was conducting its interviews) did not mean the entry of Indian films into Britain. It meant that Britain was welcoming filmmakers from the colonies as equal partners with the complete knowledge that they lacked the finances, the resources, and the knowledge to participate in the competition. I quote the outspoken Mr Barucha, an Indian film exhibitor, who was interviewed by the Committee:

Mr Green [a British member of the Indian Cinematograph Committee]

. Does not the Bill, as I have endeavoured to explain to you, give a better opportunity for Indian-made films to be exported to England?

Answer [Mr Barucha] On paper it appears that by the mere passage of this Bill in England, the market will be thrown open for Indian films, but I am not sure if that would be beneficial to India in the long run. Theoretically it appears that Indian films will have an open door in England, but I am not sure that there will be any appreciable and genuine demand for them in England. . I

will go a bit further and say this. Suppose India now definitely commits herself to the policy of participating in what is called the British Empire scheme. For the present we are allowed to produce our own pictures to meet our own demands and needs. But I do not think they are really anxious to have Indian pictures in England. I dismiss that idea altogether from my mind at once. What is the guarantee, I ask, Sir, that the next step will not be the imposing of some condition which will prevent Indian pictures being manufactured in our own country, and the only result of this Bill will be that we will be compelled to have British pictures.

Mr Green: The Bill is not going to be applied to India.  
Col Crawford [British Committee member] The point is, does the producer want an opportunity to sell his goods in the world market? Is it of any value to him?

Answer [Mr Barucha] The idea undoubtedly looks splendid [but] I have grave doubts about it. You need not accept my statement alone. This will be clear from other circumstances also. How many Indian-made articles, let alone Indian-made films, find a ready market in the Empire? I cannot sell a single Indian-made shoe in England.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Indian Cinematograph Committee 1927–1928: Evidence Volume One: Oral Evidence of Witnesses Examined at Bombay and Karachi with their Written Statements* (Calcutta: Government of India: Central Publication Branch, 1928) pp 138–40.

While utilized as evidence of the porous nature of British regulation when it came to trade within the imperial (constructed here as a ‘global’) market and wielded as a tool to acquire reciprocal arrangements from markets such as India, the protection of the Quota Act of 1927 was essentially meant for British films. This was obvious to Mr Barucha and to most Indian cinematographers interviewed by the Indian Cinematograph Committee, as is apparent in the four fascinating volumes of written and oral evidence collected from 353 film producers, exhibitors, distributors and actors working in India in the 1920s.<sup>30</sup> Based on the overwhelmingly negative response of the interviewees to the introduction of imperial preference in India, the Indian Cinematograph Committee reported to the government of India and the India Office in Britain that regulatory assistance for British films in India was unnecessary and unwelcome. In the course of their research, the committee had found that between 1925 and 1927, of the 108 feature films produced in England, seventy-four films had been imported by India. Notwithstanding the fact that India had taken such a large number of England’s output, British films accounted for a mere ten per cent of India’s imported films while Hollywood films constituted eighty per cent of its imports. The Committee interpreted this fact in two ways. First, they argued that the British film industry produced insufficient pictures and few of the same competitive price and quality as Hollywood, but ‘when British Empire films can show the quality and finish and can be had for the same price as other Western films, there will be no difficulty in those films finding such market as is

<sup>30</sup> All four volumes are available at the National Film Archives of India, Pune, India. The Report based on the evidence is also available at the Nehru Memorial Archives, New Delhi, India.

31 *Report of the Indian Cinematograph Committee* p 102

32 *Ibid* p 103 For another analysis of this report along similar lines see Someswar Bhowmik *Indian Cinema Colonial Contours* (Calcutta Papyrus 1995)

available in this country' <sup>31</sup> Further, as long as India depended on the USA for eighty per cent of its films while constituting no more than half of one per cent of America's cinema revenue, she could 'ill afford to estrange' the country by giving preference to empire films <sup>32</sup> Their report effectively thwarted any further discussion of imperial preference for British films in India

Moreover, the Indian exhibitor Barucha was accurate in his evaluation that the passage of the British Quota Act of 1927 would not lead to any significant increase in the market for Indian films in Britain, thus nullifying the grounds for discussion of Britain's reciprocity with India Subsequent to the Act of 1927, Indian-made films found occasional distribution in Britain but seldom got a release One of the loopholes in the Act of 1927 was that while British renters were legally obliged to acquire a certain percentage of British (that is, British Empire) films, they were not penalized if no one booked them for exhibition Thus long, silent films from India were distributed in Britain, mostly to sit on renters' shelves as quota-fillers. The advantage to a British renter of using an Indian film as quota was that it was extremely cheap. *Film Report*, a trade journal of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association in Britain, evaluated Indian films such as *Durgesh Nandini*, *Madhuri*, *Anarkali*, *Krishna Kanta's Will* and *The Tigress* as qualified to be rental quotas and not much else. The journal describes *Durgesh Nandini* as 'an Indian production, played by natives As a production, it is extremely crude.

The picture is for all practical purposes just a Renter's Quota.' *Madhuri* is estimated as 'another of those films which, being made in India and interpreted by a native cast, rank as quota', and none of the films are given release dates <sup>33</sup>

While films from British India or British Africa did not appeal to a British audience, films from the dominions posed a greater threat to British film producers This is evident in the amendments made to the Quota Act when it came up for renewal ten years later The Report on the Act of 1927, also known as the Moyne Committee Report submitted by the Board of Trade to Parliament in 1936, recommended that the protection of the revised Quota Act be extended to 'Empire' films, but exclude 'Dominion' films 'Dominion' films, *not* a category in the previous Act, now needed to be distinguished from the definition of what constituted British films primarily because such films presented unwelcome competition to the films produced by Britain – a factor that was exaggerated after the coming of sound. Linguistic and cultural affinities between Britain and its dominions threatened to make a Canadian or an Australian film a truly viable alternative to British films within Britain.

Additionally, different forces ranging from anti-imperial sentiments to competing economic imperialisms made it obvious that Britain had little hold over its imperial film market For instance, the Canadian government had been making a long-standing effort to persuade US

33 See *Film Report* 18 January 1930 p 568 15 February 1930 p 571 26 April 1930 p 581 and 7 June 1930 p 587

film companies to produce films in their country. These efforts were realized between 1928 and 1936, when the USA was looking for ways to beat the British quota system and found a loophole in the term 'British Empire films'. Given that films produced in Canada counted as 'British films' under the terms of the 1927 Act, US companies were lured into producing films in Canada and using them, subsequently, as quota films in the British market. The exclusion of dominion films from the category of British Empire film in 1936 was critical for the prevention of such unforeseen uses of the Act. Also, British Columbia's attempt at passing a Bill extending special privileges to empire films was thwarted by the Cooper Organization, a pressure group that represented the US Hays Office and that was funded largely by US distributors. The Canadian market was too precious to the USA for them to permit Britain to secure any percentage of it through regulations.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, where it was politically possible to do so, territories within the British Empire attempted to protect their markets from Great Britain and to develop independently. In Australia, for instance, quota legislations similar to the one in Britain were passed, that required the exhibition of a percentage of locally produced films. The British industry feared that foreign distributors supplying to the dominion as well as the British market would distribute dominion films rather than British films, since that would fulfill the quota in both areas.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Pendakur *Canadian Dreams*  
pp. 78–87, 134

<sup>35</sup> *Cinematograph Films Act, 1927*  
p. 27

In recommending amendments, the expectations of reciprocity implicit in the Act of 1927 were made explicit. Advising revisions, the Moyne Committee Report of 1936 assesses 'British Films in the Dominions' and points out that by defining an Australian or Canadian film as 'British' in the Quota Act of 1927, 'it was not unnaturally anticipated that in the course of time reciprocal treatment of this kind would be given to films made in Great Britain by other parts of the empire where film quota legislation might be passed'. It goes on to acknowledge that 'This hope has generally not been fulfilled'. Eventually, under the revised Cinematograph Films Act, films from the dominions were made ineligible for quota within the British market. After the exclusion of dominion films, films from British colonies were the only non-British films included in the term 'British Empire films'. However, under a section titled 'Empire films', the Moyne Committee Report of 1936 states

It has been made clear in evidence before us that there is no lack of desire on the part of exhibitors in this country [that is, Britain] to show on their screens films made in other parts of the Empire, provided those films are not confined in their public appeal to that portion of the Empire where they are made. . . we feel sure that Empire films of good quality will be welcomed by exhibitors equally with films made in Great Britain. Clearly . . . they should satisfy the same quality test as films made here.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 26–7

With this disclaimer, films from colonies were effectively screened out, on the basis that they were not in English and were 'local' in their appeal. However, the continued use of the term 'Empire films' in the 1938 Cinematograph Act allowed Britain to maintain an outward commitment to the equal treatment of all territories within the imperial market, enabling the British film industry to sustain the illusion that films from the colonies were being given preferential treatment within Britain.

Every symbolic shift in this context was grounded in a material change in circumstances. The extended example of the Acts shows that the Britain that was in competition with Hollywood was a shifting entity, casting about for markets within its nation and its empire. In this particular instance, the term 'British Empire' had to be explicitly redefined to maintain the advantage for the British nation, by excluding the dominions. By the 1930s, the illusion of colonial benefit was important to sustain if there was to be any negotiation regarding reciprocity. Britain's policies were aimed at coaxing its colonies and dominions into trade agreements; a hope that, as the Moyne Committee stated, was 'generally not fulfilled' in the case of film. 'British Empire' emerges as a term that hid more than it revealed, and invoked a territory that was not in the least evident and not much of a collective entity by 1930.

Interestingly, the definition of the British Empire in the Cinematograph Act of 1927 betrays none of the slipperiness with which the term is used in the discussions surrounding the Act. The Act states: 'The expression "British Empire" includes territories under His Majesty's protection and territories in respect of which a mandate on behalf of the League of Nations has been accepted by His Majesty'.<sup>37</sup> Despite the seeming simplicity of this definition, the vague usage of the term in discussions surrounding the regulation of such a national commodity as film was tactical, as opinions were sharply divided over Britain's domestic as opposed to its imperial obligations. In a context where the issue of whether colonies fortified the domestic market or diverted finances away from centre was being contested, non-specific references to the 'Empire market' and the 'Empire film' conveyed the impression of catering to all territories without committing to the preferential treatment of any one, thus appearing conciliatory and non-controversial with regard to the colonial question which inspired anything but consensus within the British nation. Whether the discussion pertained to the British nation, the dominions, or the colonies, they could all be gestured at vaguely by referring to the empire. Most often, the non-specificity of the term worked to Britain's advantage. The obscuring uses of the term 'empire' served to present Britain's national interest as an inter-imperial concern. A nation with a (weakening) investment in the empire could still appear to represent global concerns while its argument was at base a parochial one, by virtue of the fact that it

<sup>37</sup> Part IV 26 (5) of the Act  
reprinted in *The Cinema News*  
and *Property Gazette*  
17 November 1927 pp. i-viii

could refer to overseas markets while protecting a domestic industry

In addition to holding up for interrogation the relationship between the nation-state and an uncooperative imperial arena, we need to question the attitude of the state towards an internally contentious industry. Though the British state came down on behalf of protecting its film production, the British film industry was also composed of factions campaigning for increased cooperation with Hollywood. To narrate the beginning of state protectionism in film is to tell a story of nationalist sentiment solidifying itself around an issue and identifying itself with a select sector of the industry. In this process, arguments of one sector of the film industry were represented as national issues and were redefined as inter-imperial concerns by an increasing number of interested film producers and statesmen, to be reified eventually within state regulation. Thus the argument that Britain's national interest was manufactured as an issue concerning all of the empire must be qualified with the sense that this representation of national interest satisfied no more than one sector of the British film industry. The partisan nature of the quota proposal was always overt in discussions of it. For instance, Ramsay McDonald, in a House of Commons debate, called it a 'party Bill'. According to him, 'it does not consider the full needs of exhibitors and producers and renters. . . . It has been prompted over almost Clause by Clause by one side engaged and interested in the controversy – the side of the producers, and not all of them, but one section of the producers'.<sup>38</sup>

**38** *Parliamentary Debates: Commons*  
fifth ser. vol. 203 (1927)  
col. 2050

The debates surrounding the Quota Act within the British film industry are instructive in revealing what lay behind the legislation's construction of a divided industry as a supposedly unified national enterprise. Ostensibly, the state intervened in the film industry because the organizations representing the exhibitors, renters and producers could not come to a consensus regarding unified action. To quote Cunliffe-Lister during the second reading of the Cinematograph Bill in the House of Commons in 1927:

The effects of the constant exhibition of foreign films on the sentiment, habit, thought of the people is obvious. The picture shows the foreign flag, styles, standards, habits, advertisements, etc. . . . I submit that the need for the development of the British film, from a national point of view, is firmly established; and if it cannot be developed without Government intervention, then, I submit, the case for Government intervention is made out.<sup>39</sup>

**39** *Ibid.* col. 2042

As the debates over the nature of the regulations continued, the pro-quota lobby (of producers) as well as the anti-quota lobby (of exhibitors and renters) identified the interests of their sector with

'national' interests. However disparate the arguments over the issue of quota, competing sides in the debates paid allegiance to the construct of a nation, which emerged as a legitimating entity. In debates around the institution of a quota, the nation acquired an external fixity even as it was produced within each position that identified itself with national interest. In effect, we find both the pro- and the anti-quota lobbies making a case for the overlap between their interests and those of the nation as a way of sanctioning their stance.

The FBI's arguments favouring the protection of Britain's domestic market and encouraging the protection of empire markets did not have to belabour the ways in which national interests could be served by interventionist measures. Their line of persuasion was simple. American films were endangering national culture and siphoning out precious capital, in order to attract capital to British films a guaranteed market was required; this could be found in the domestic and empire markets, if the state introduced measures to protect them. Dissent against the proposed protection of domestic and empire markets came from British renters and exhibitors who would bear the brunt of a regulation that would require them to rent and show a quota of British films. This anti-quota lobby had a slimmer argument in proving the overlap between their interests and those of the nation, primarily because their argument revealed the economic divisiveness of the various sectors of the film industry, and undermined the idea of an ideologically coherent national entity.

Yet there appear to be two main approaches adopted by renters, exhibitors and others affiliated with the film industry who were critical of a quota. One was to represent the exhibition and distribution sectors as the crux of a national film industry, and as the only ones in a position to bargain for Britain with Hollywood's producers. Much like the British film producers' (and the FBI's) emphasis on measures that could elicit reciprocal trade arrangements from colonial and dominion states, the exhibitors stressed that some form of reciprocal arrangements for exchanging films could be made with Hollywood.<sup>40</sup> If the imperial request of reciprocity from colonies and dominions was proposed on the basis of the supposed preferential treatment provided to 'Empire films' in the British market, attempts at achieving reciprocity with the USA were based on marketing British *audiences*. Hollywood wanted British film audiences, and the attractiveness of the British film market was the only card that the British film industry could play in its negotiations with the USA. In fact, the anti-quota lobby was making one strong argument to emphasize the significance of Britain in the world of film. This was the 'fact that the British market has increased in relative importance for American pictures'. The renters and exhibitors made an argument against protectionism by shifting grounds from the performance of British films to the desirability of the British market.

<sup>40</sup> Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, pp. 24–5 describe the reciprocity talks that were prepared in Britain in April 1926 to persuade the Americans to distribute more British films.

For the exhibitors, the advantage of proposing negotiations and reciprocal talks with the USA was that, given the dismal state of British production, exhibitors were the only ones qualified to sit at the negotiating table. Charles Lapworth, a spokesperson for the anti-quota lobby, points out that the exhibitor was the one member of the British film industry who was doing well, and argues that 'it has got to be acknowledged, that for all practical purposes the British exhibitors *are* the British film trade'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Both quotes from Charles Lapworth. 'Production and the exhibitor' reprinted in *Kinematograph Weekly* 6 August 1925, p. 32.

Secondly, the renters and exhibitors attempted to establish protective legislation as antithetical to British thought, and to link national pride with the quality of national films. This concern was about the type of films a quota would produce and was related to speculations on the availability of talent in Britain. Hollywood films were represented as a commodity that filled a market need that could not be satisfied domestically. The Cinematograph Exhibitors Association (CEA), in presenting its opposition to the proposed quota legislation during the second reading of the Cinematograph Films Bill at the House of Commons, opened its argument with this.

Films to meet the popular taste can no more be produced in Great Britain in such quantities and of such character as are needed than could be oranges and tobacco. Geographical and climactic conditions, to say nothing of the lack of suitable artists, are negative circumstances which conclusively render any substantial proportion of British films impossible.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> BFI Subject Cuttings. Legislations – Cinematograph Films Act 1927. Document titled 'Cinematograph films bill reasons against' by the Manchester and District Branch of the CEA of Great Britain and Ireland, np.

Their statement also emphasized that the Bill would bring 'loss and disaster' to one section of the trade and 'easy profits' to another which had neither deserved it, nor shown its worth. In debates where opposing sides consolidated their position by claiming to be more British than the other factions, the exhibitors displayed their commitment to the nation by proclaiming allegiance to the principles of free trade and commercialism. According to the CEA, subjecting the exhibitors 'to certain loss by forcing inferior films upon them to bolster up an industry which lacks the enterprise necessary to defeat the foreign producer' was possibly a 'political conception of justice' but it was 'not in accord with British traditions in this respect'.<sup>43</sup> The exhibitors' disparaging reference to a 'political [perhaps more accurately rendered as a 'politicized'] conception of justice' made visible a widening fracture in Britain's avowed commitment to the neutrality of market economics, as the equation of freedom with an unrestricted market could no longer be sustained by an imperial state when such an economic philosophy no longer worked to its advantage.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. np.

The anti-quota lobby maintained that quota protection would encourage the production of inferior films that would have a detrimental effect on Britain's reputation within the empire. Meyrick Milton, author of a pamphlet titled 'Concerning legislation to

encourage Empire films', argues that such films would serve to 'stultify the British Nation in the eyes of the Empire and to advertise its incompetence to the world' <sup>44</sup> In his view, this was tantamount to making British films the penalty one had to pay for renting a foreign film

<sup>44</sup> Meyrick Milton *Concerning Legislation to Encourage Empire Films* (London: Austin Leigh 1927) p. 9

The British film would become the powder wrapped in foreign meat to make the dog swallow it, the medicine to deserve the jam. If Government officials had gone out of their way to discredit British films, they could not have hit upon a more ingenious device <sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6

As it happened, the Act did encourage several undesirable practices. By and large, Hollywood companies and British renters calculated ways to beat the quota, and fly-by-night British production studios took advantage of it. 'Quota Quickies' or films produced with relatively little investment of capital to fulfil the quota flooded the domestic market and even found their way to an 'empire market' like India, <sup>46</sup> exaggerating Britain's inferior output in comparison to Hollywood fare. It should be added, though, that despite the damaging consequences of subordinating distribution and exhibition to production, it is doubtful that British films would have survived without some form of state protectionism. In the final analysis, the Quota Act boosted British film production and encouraged the formation of virtually integrated companies similar to those in Hollywood, fulfilling one of its undeclared intents.

<sup>46</sup> *The Bombay Government Gazette* 13 July 1933 p. 1633

For Britain in the 1920s and 1930s, film industries like Hollywood were to be imitated and contested and the empire market was to be assisted and enticed. Both occupied a distinctive place within Britain's evolving conceptualization of a national cinema and industry. As parts of the empire achieved varying degrees of political and economic independence, the empire retained, for the imperial state, some of its anachronistic significance of being a national prerogative. This in-between status of the empire – as potentially subordinate to British needs but increasingly constituted by independent political and administrative wills – is visible in the British film industry's conceptualization of empire markets and its attempted 'tilling' of imperial fields. The British state's construction of a national product that mobilized certain assumptions about its relationship to the empire during decolonization constitutes the very centre of the problem. If we place Britain's precarious hold over its imperial and domestic film markets at the core of our analysis, gestures of regulatory negotiation emerge as subtle attempts by the British state at redefining its position within the empire while exercising diluted imperial authority. They suggest an imperial nation-state adapting to an environment of US domination, internal factionalization, and increasing colonial/dominion sovereignty. A close analysis of workings of language and power in regulatory

documents of this period is critical if we are to understand the conditions under which national film industries came to be officially conceptualized within formative shifts in global politics

# Narrative spaces

MARK GARRETT COOPER

- 1 Stephen Heath, 'Narrative space' in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington IN Indiana University Press 1981) pp 19–75 Originally published in *Screen*, vol 17, no 3 (1976) pp 68–112
- 2 David Norman Rodowick *The Crisis of Political Modernism Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley CA University of California Press 1994) pp 180–220
- 3 Heath 'Narrative space' p 40

A quarter of a century has passed since Stephen Heath married the terms 'narrative' and 'space' and thereby described cinema's unique contribution to modern representational form<sup>1</sup> Although surveys of film theory typically make Heath's 'Narrative space' a chapter in the ongoing saga of 'the spectator' and the 'classical realist text', the essay may also be credited with recovering the dialectic between visual form and narrative content that makes cinematic spectatorship a recognizable problem in the first place<sup>2</sup> For Heath, narrative ensures that film's mobile frames and figures remain consumable for a viewer weaned on Renaissance perspective It collaborates with the camera's optics to provide something akin to painting's static viewpoint and in the process recentres the subject *qua* spectator If narrative guarantees spatial coherence, however, Heath makes equally plain that manipulation of spatial difference ensures cinema's narrative intelligibility In order to explain how mobile, two-dimensional frames contrive to render a coherent three-dimensional world, he considers how films subdivide that abstract, putatively empty space into concrete, bounded places in which narrative events occur. Once acknowledged, this dynamic relation of narrative and space makes cinema look quite distinct from Renaissance painting and, for that matter, from the traditions of literary realism that Hollywood narrative is also said to 'relay and extend'<sup>3</sup> Although Heath continues to treat cinema's spectator as the latest figure to occupy a centuries-old viewing position, he also reminds us of the difference that the formal habits of movie narrative make While twenty-five years worth of argument over the spectator has successfully displaced the contention that Renaissance perspective provides cinema's leading instrument of interpellation, it has

meaningfully advanced neither Heath's insight into the spatial processes of cinematic storytelling nor his suggestion that film ideology resides in those processes

The Lumière brothers' 1895 *L'Arroseur arrosé* illustrates this impasse. The fact that the film tells a story is not in dispute, yet a generation of critics has declined to explain exactly how its story is told. In their introductory text, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson cite *L'Arroseur arrosé* as evidence that 'narrative form entered cinema from the beginning'.<sup>4</sup> And even a scholar so resolutely hostile to giving cinema a narrative telos as Noel Burch credits the film with 'adumbrating narrative closure'.<sup>5</sup> Although the premisses and aims of Burch differ substantially from those of Bordwell and Thompson, neither elaborates beyond the observation that *L'Arroseur arrosé* narrates. Those who do, tend to subordinate consideration of the film's story to questions of how it manipulates perspective or of what relationship its individual frames bear to its single shot.<sup>6</sup> It is as if the very obviousness of the story makes superfluous any description of its narrative technique. Nonetheless, we would do well to remember why the eponymous *arroseur*, intent on his watering, fails to notice the troublemaker who spies on him from behind the tall bush on the right-hand side of the frame. He fails to see because the *mise-en-scène* is divided into two distinct areas, only one of which is within his purview. When this division creates the *arroseur's* blindspot, it also makes possible the film's elementary sequence of cause and effect. The hose leaves the gardener's hand and snakes across the image to traverse the division marked by the intrusive bush, beyond which the prankster's foot protrudes to block the flow of water. Once the gardener becomes thoroughly engrossed in his examination of the arid nozzle, his adversary releases the flood. While the hose writhes in the foreground, the dripping gardener chases the laughing miscreant from behind the bush and into the depth of the image before dragging him back into the foreground to exact his revenge. Careful framing and arrangement of props, scenery and actors plainly distinguish the left foreground of the frame, with its menacing hose, from the hiding place behind the bush. In this manner, the Lumières show that what happens in one region of the frame has consequences for what happens in the other. Once the qualitative distinction between these two areas collapses, the story ends and the film with it.

While spatial differentiation facilitates the rudimentary story of *L'Arroseur arrosé*, much of the Lumière brothers' early work avoids such sharp distinctions and thus tells no story. The gardener's tale stands in contrast, for instance, to the action captured by *Children Digging Shrimp*. Here, children play with nets and spades in the shallow water of the foreground while adults promenade through the middle and extreme background of the image. While one can roughly distinguish the foreground from the middleground and background,

4 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson *Film Art: an Introduction* sixth edition (New York: McGraw Hill 2001) p. 401

5 Noel Burch *Life to those Shadows* trans. and ed. Ben Brewster (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1990) p. 33

6 Richard De Cordova 'From Lumière to Pathé: the break-up of perspectival space' in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds) *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute 1990) pp. 76–85. Andre Gaudreault 'Film narrative narration: the cinema of the Lumière brothers' in Elsaesser and Barker (eds) *Early Cinema* pp. 68–75

nothing in the mise-en-scene obstructs movement or vision through this singular space. Accordingly, no region of the frame plainly affects any other, and the film seems to begin and end in an arbitrary manner. Were the frame rearranged to suggest that the adults in its middle could spy upon the children unobserved by them in the foreground, then perhaps a visual narrative (somewhat more prurient than that of *L'Arroseur arrosé*) would begin to emerge. The replete frame of *Children Digging Shrimp* evinces the Lumières' much remarked-on delight in the camera as a device for recording everyday life. More emphatically than the watering of the gardener, it indicates a moment before it became clear that cinema would develop into the sort of narrative form that is now so familiar. The beach goers' activities do not readily convey a story; while there is a sequence to their actions, they do not occur in the cause and effect relationship that typically defines narrative structure.

Yet the Lumières' two films also illustrate the limitations of such abstract definitions of 'narrative'. If 'a sequence of events in cause-effect relationship' captures what is ordinarily meant by 'a story', such a definition does little to explain what it means to narrate in one form rather than another. The whole point of the definition is to delimit the form of 'stories' at the expense of the manner in which any particular sort of story might be expressed. Thus one could no doubt produce a definition of narrative perverse enough, or a reading strong enough, to identify something like a conventional plot in *Children Digging Shrimp*, or even to deny the existence of a story in *L'Arroseur arrosé*. To understand why only the latter elicits the spontaneous recognition of a narrative among late twentieth-century viewers, we might better proceed by noting that the gardener story appears through what has become a set-piece visual technique. Despite the fact that a filmmaking revolution separates *L'Arroseur arrosé* from the now ubiquitous Hollywood feature film, its manner of dividing the frame into discrete spaces drives any number of recent film episodes. Only consider the convention, shared by melodrama, thriller and horror film alike, whereby the villain looms in a space just behind the unsuspecting heroine. The narrative begins to unfold as he, or it, sneaks around the corner, rises slowly from behind the sofa, emerges from the superstructure of the spaceship, or what have you. Even more strongly than the comedic efforts of *L'Arroseur arrosé*, such episodes use the juxtaposition of distinct spaces – both within and across frames – to tell their stories. There are doubtless other ways to narrate in pictures; and certainly, moving images have been accompanied by verbal language, which has its own powers of narration. Nonetheless, in few respects other than this characteristic spatial dynamic can the visual form of *L'Arroseur arrosé* be said to forecast later developments in cinematic narrative or to exemplify its manifestation at cinema's inception. The film's story cannot be

attributed to its procedures for editing – there is no editing. Nor can its framing, the static long shot of early cinema, serve to establish a comparison with Hollywood storytelling technique. What we have learned to recognize as ordinary film narrative does not result from such procedures, I propose, but can only be understood as a process of spatial transformation.

This contention necessarily displaces two of the most enduring premisses in film theory: first, that the techniques of production define film form, and second, that shots are the fundamental units from which films are made. It bears remembering that these premisses were not entirely satisfying to those typically credited with establishing them. Conventions for articulating one shot to the next do indeed provide the main bone of contention in André Bazin's foundational argument against Sergei Eisenstein. Nonetheless, Eisenstein critiques the notion that shots are the 'building blocks' of film and insists that the contents of the frame provide their own principles of division, conflict, and articulation; hence his pronouncement that 'the shot is by no means an element of montage. The shot is a montage cell (or molecule)'.<sup>7</sup> Bazin therefore attacks a straw man when he counters Eisenstein's 'montage' by finding 'at the very heart of silent film . . . a language the semantic and syntactic unit of which is in no sense the Shot'.<sup>8</sup> Both theorists rely on the shot as an analytic unit, but each acknowledges it to be inadequate to the task of explaining how films make meaning for their viewers. This ambivalent insight recurs throughout film theory.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, the sense of theoretical inadequacy results from awareness that no single technique of production will suffice to describe the semiotic organization of the visual field for a viewer. It is a foredoomed endeavour to define film space in terms of the articulation of shots alone, as if such articulation occurred irrespective of the organization of the *mise-en-scène*. Nonetheless, just such a reduction of spatial construction to editing technique has been necessary to establish the purportedly undifferentiated story space of 'the diegesis' as the hallmark of the ordinary Hollywood feature film.

Precisely because of his ambivalent use of 'the diegesis', David Bordwell's work best exemplifies the liability of a shot-based account of cinematic form. His *Narration in the Fiction Film* provides the most systematic critique to date of the proposition that the camera's optics and placement define film space and enable cinematic narration. Accordingly, Bordwell dismisses the analogy between camera and spectator and with it Christian Metz's influential notion that the camera 'enunciates' space and thereby grants the spectator the illusion of controlling the film story.<sup>10</sup> While this argument comes remarkably close to dethroning the shot along with the camera, Bordwell's depiction of the relationship between film style and storytelling ultimately extends its reign. He defines 'style' as 'the film's systematic use of cinematic devices' ('*mise-en-scène*).

7 Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, ed. Jay Leyda (San Diego: CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 53. Italics removed from original.

8 André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Volume I, ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: CA: University of California Press, 1967), p. 28.

9 To mention a few additional instances: Christian Metz refutes the proposition that the shot be considered the minimum semiotic unit of film despite the fact that his turn towards film syntax installs it as the main analytic unit in *Film Language* (Chicago: IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Michel Chion provides a lengthy demonstration of how sounds and images collaborate to signify spaces irreducible to shots: only to find himself supporting the shot as a unit 'that everyone . . . can agree on' in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 41). Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs show how reliance on shots over scenes thwarts consideration of cinema's historical debt to and departure from theatre in *Theatre to Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 3–17.

10 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 16–26, 99–146.

11 Ibid p 50

12 Fabula events must be represented as occurring in a spatial frame of reference however vague or abstract Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film* p 50 See also Bordwell and Thompson *Film Art*, pp 60–67, Edward Branigan *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (New York: Routledge 1992)

13 Here I also depart from Seymour Chatman's influential account in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1978) see esp p 96 I do not reject the analysis of narrative structure *per se* simply the postulate that the categories of event, character, time and space enjoy comparable relations to one another in all forms. Much preferable, in my view, is Roland Barthes's suggestion that a fundamental investigation of what the units of narrative are should precede the question of what in narrative translates across various forms of semiosis. See his Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives in *Image Music Text* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1977) p 121

14 David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press 1985)

15 Rick Altman, Dickens, Griffith and film theory today *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol 88 no 2 (1989) pp 321–60 Linda Williams *Melodrama* revised in Nick Browne (ed.) *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1998) pp 42–88

16 See, for instance, Leo Carney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds) *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995) Anne Friedberg *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1993) Lynne Kirby *Parallel Tracks: the Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1997)

cinematography, editing and sound') and plot (*syuzhet*) as the 'formal patterns of withheld knowledge or abrupt revelation' on the basis of which viewers retroactively construe a story (*fabula*).<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, he sees style as 'wholly ingredient to the medium' and implies that the medium may still best be described in terms of production technique. In contrast, Bordwell treats plot as a 'dramaturgical' entity abstractly distinguishable from the medium, and the story we infer on its basis even more so. Thus, although Bordwell takes pains to point out that no movie story could exist without spatialization, he leaves the impression that such tales are not themselves immanently spatial. They happen to occur 'in' space, but film narrative itself may be defined otherwise.<sup>12</sup> Examination of *L'Arroseur arrosé* prompts a very different assessment. Rather than simply happening 'in' the time and space of its single shot, the plot springs from the juxtaposition of discrete spaces, from the unfolding relationship between regions of the frame that communicates cause and effect. The story does not happen *in* space so much as *to* space.<sup>13</sup> In order to understand the narrative kinship between this early Lumière's film and later institutional filmmaking, therefore, it is necessary to move beyond Bordwell's critique, to forego the associations of style with production and medium with technique, and to explain the difference spatial form makes to narrative content.

Only by re-establishing the dialectic between space and narrative can we hope to answer the question of what movies did to and for the cultures that produced and consumed them during the period of Hollywood's dramatic rise. When Bordwell drives a wedge between film's production methods and its narratives, he gives the former a historical basis in filmmaking institutions while making the latter a more or less transhistorical and transgeneric entity. Bordwell is eager enough to discard models that explain film ideology as a continuation of earlier varieties of realism. And, together with Thompson and Janet Staiger, he provides the best, most lavishly detailed account to date of Hollywood production methods.<sup>14</sup> Yet in the end, the authors can only reiterate the argument that US filmmaking provides a stylistic variation on a longstanding classical theme. Similarly, arguments that oppose narrative 'classicism' do so by emphasizing Hollywood's debt to its supposed polar opposite, the equally hoary tradition of melodramatic spectacle.<sup>15</sup> Efforts to historicize film ideology in terms of 'the apparatus', meanwhile, are wont to set aside narrative in favour of comparisons between the sort of perception elicited by moving images and that encouraged by shop windows, railroad trains, panoramas, and so on.<sup>16</sup> My complaint is not that any of these arguments are wrong to establish the connections they do, but that in the process they recapitulate a model of cinematic form – *either* as a technique for producing images *or* as a type of narration – that inevitably turns the movies into something else.

Film theory's insistence on defining feature film form in terms of production makes it difficult to understand what that form did to narrative content. Under these circumstances, it is perfectly understandable that literary and cultural studies would feel free to dismiss the question of film form entirely. Myriad approaches establish thematic parallels across different sorts of texts, images and sounds, and thus find movies participating in broad-based narrative solutions to any number of specific ideological problems. Such rampant thematism has the singular advantage of placing particular films in historical and national context, describing, for example, why Hollywood's subject matter suited a rising new middle class or how cinema reinforced US racism.<sup>17</sup> Yet precisely because such approaches use thematic similarities to establish cinema's relationship to a history initially uncovered in writing (typically, the popular press, trade publications, fiction and social science texts) they necessarily obscure what it meant for information to appear in cinematic form. Despite repeated insistence on the historic importance of the US feature film, such criticism collaborates with film theory in encouraging us to imagine that 'US culture' was somehow defined apart from the cinematic form in which, from the turn of the century forward, it increasingly appeared. The 'kind of filmmaking felt ideologically to be ordinary' thus appears most historical where least specifically cinematic and most cinematic where least historically specific.<sup>18</sup> As a result, consideration of Hollywood's historical mission remains stalled in arguments over realist representation, and it becomes all but impossible to explain why US culture wanted particular information in the particular form of the movies at a particular moment in history and why, furthermore, such information succeeded so well around the globe.<sup>19</sup>

It might well seem peculiar to offer Heath's 'Narrative space' as the way out of this critical cul-de-sac. After all, the essay is widely regarded as the hallmark of a dated theoretical approach, one that abetted the institutionalization of film studies and thus shares the blame for whatever malaise currently afflicts it.<sup>20</sup> Even so, 'Narrative space' performs an invaluable (if infrequently noted) service when it makes consideration of the movement and articulation of frames dependent on consideration of the particular stories those frames are designed to tell. The essay's virtue, in other words, lies in its refusal to define either 'narrative' or 'space' apart from cinema's conventional manner of relating the two. Crucial as this argument is, Heath does not allow it finally to displace the shot, and thus falls short of specifying an alternative conception of film form. To do so, we need only pick up where Heath leaves off. Heath observes that the looks characters exchange with one another provide both narrative and spatial information. I would add that the exchange and separation of looks animates Hollywood cinema's most common narrative pattern: the love story. The typical union, separation and

<sup>17</sup> In for example Lary May *Screening out the Past: the Motion Picture and the Birth of Consumer Society 1900-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Micheal Rogin *Blackface: White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Robert Sklar *Movie-Made America: a Social History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975).

<sup>18</sup> Christian Metz *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans Annwy Williams, Celia Britton, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Armstrong explains how and why the problem of visuality animates the debate over realism more generally in *Fiction in the Age of Photography: the Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Dudley Andrew *The "three ages" of cinema studies and the age to come* *PMLA*, vol. 115, no. 3 (2000), pp. 341-51.

reunion of lovers, moreover, depends less on any particular arrangement of shots than it does on the subdivision of the visual field into distinct spaces within and across frames. In this limited respect, Hollywood narration resembles the storytelling procedure of its predecessor *L'Arroseur arrosé*. To be sure, Hollywood narrative differs markedly in its address to a viewer. But to understand that difference we cannot rely on production technique. Rather, we must understand the spatial problem posed and resolved by the type of romance narrative that began to repeat itself in US films around 1910, continued to do so through seemingly endless permutations for the remainder of the twentieth century, and even now shows few signs of abating.

### The space of narrative

Like many other essays of its period, Heath's 'Narrative space' represents the formal rules of Renaissance perspective as the defining model of modern space. According to this still familiar account, the West has, since the fifteenth century, conceived of space as an empty container mapped by a grid system. Manipulation of the grid according to geometric rules renders depth in two dimensions and in the process establishes an ideal point from which to view the picture. To represent space in this manner is thus to interpellate a subject *qua* spectator who appears to master it. This reasoning has since been attacked from all quarters. Noel Carroll contends that the connection between perspectival form and modern subjectivity is merely rhetorical, resulting from the use of 'unity' and 'unified' to describe both the geometrical point from which perspective is seen and the subject who sees from this point of view.<sup>21</sup> In criticizing the notion of 'position', Bordwell demonstrates that films routinely cue relations of depth through techniques distinct from Renaissance geometry.<sup>22</sup> Carroll and Bordwell each make poststructuralist accounts of the subject the ultimate object of attack, but the equation of perspective and interpellation has hardly flourished among this camp. Art historian Jonathan Crary refutes the historical continuity of the Renaissance model by demonstrating that the camera obscura ceased to provide the prevailing metaphor for vision and contemplation during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Kaja Silverman shows how emphasis on perspectival form encouraged a characteristic misreading of Lacan's concept of 'the gaze'. This misreading collapses the gaze and the spectator's look by associating both with the camera's point of view, where Lacan radically distinguishes gaze and look by insisting on the image as a mediating term.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Henri Lefebvre attacks as idealist the premiss that 'space' exists as an empty container to be filled, and consequently produces an account of Renaissance perspective that places less

<sup>21</sup> Noel Carroll, 'Address to the Heathen', *October* no. 23 (1982), pp. 89–163.

<sup>22</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 99–146.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

25 Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space* [first French edition 1974] (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991)

26 Nor is it even built into every lens in the same way. Heath *Narrative spaces*, p. 31

27 See Bordwell *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 99–146

28 Heath *Narrative spaces*, p. 45

29 *Ibid.*

emphasis on the ‘position’ of the view than on the properties of the spaces that imply it.<sup>25</sup> Although none of this scholarship renders perspective unimportant, the overall trend has clearly made Heath’s model for relating it to cinematic spectatorship seem reductive, if not obsolete. Yet in key respects, Heath’s argument anticipates the general dissatisfaction with the Renaissance-perspective-as-interpellative-grid model. Through this dissatisfaction, it suggests a very different account of film form.

Heath acknowledges two principal factors that undermine the analogy between Renaissance painting and cinema, both of which have to do with movement. First, he notes that while one might find the rules of perspective built into the optics of the lens and might therefore contend that each shot inevitably reproduces those rules, one can hardly maintain that every frame offers the same vantage point, or even refers to the same imaginary grid.<sup>26</sup> Each reframing, whether by cutting or camera movement, can potentially upset the coordinates established by the previous frame and thought to extend beyond it. Second, the movement of figures within the frame can imply relations of depth apart from perspectival codes. Character motion is said to take place ‘in’ scenographic space, but this movement also establishes relationships among elements in the picture. And again, changing the elements within the picture affects how we imagine the space out of frame.<sup>27</sup> Thus, every frame potentially conjures a new space thought to extend beyond its borders. This proliferation of out-of-frame space, even more than multiplication of the frame itself, menaces the perspectival system.

Despite major difficulties with the Renaissance model, however, Heath maintains that Hollywood’s conventional filmmaking procedures can still be understood in its terms. Constant manipulation by the filmmakers ensures that moving frames and figures do not *disrupt the coherence of perspectival space – hence Heath’s famous assertion that ‘the work of classical continuity is not to hide or ignore offscreen space but – to contain it, to regularize its fluctuation in a constant movement of reappropriation’*.<sup>28</sup> If the emphasis on the ‘containment’ of excess signification dates Heath’s account, it remains significant that he dismantled the notion that perspective alone could guarantee a coherent cinematic space.

As Heath goes on to demonstrate, not even the formal rules for articulating frames (for example, continuity editing) suffice to ‘regularize the fluctuation of containment’. Reframing must be motivated by content. Paraphrasing the conventional wisdom of Hollywood filmmakers, Heath notes that ‘the off-screen space recaptured must be “called for”, must be “logically consequential”, must arrive as “answer”, “fulfillment of promise”’ in short it ‘must be narrativized’.<sup>29</sup> The shot/reverse-shot figure will become his central example, in which a character’s look out of the frame cries out for a mate, for another character who appears to look back at the

first Through such devices, Heath argues, film sutures over any difference that would threaten spatial unity, and, at the same time, sutures the spectator into the world of the film, as an apparent source, rather than effect, of signification Before arriving at the theory of suture, however, Heath asserts a more general principle 'what gives the moving space its coherence in time', he writes, is 'the narrative itself', above all as it crystallizes 'round character as look and point of view'<sup>30</sup> The import of this sentence will elude us so long as we imagine 'the narrative itself' to equal the sort of plot summary conventionally given in words Heath makes this plain by recalling experimental filmmaker Michael Snow's insight that, in film, 'events take place' What happens in the plot happens in space If the plot involves a murder, it will be necessary to prepare a spot for the body to fall Thus, when Heath writes that 'the narrative itself' gives 'moving space its coherence', he is proposing that it takes individual spatialized events to establish the general properties of film space. Whether or not space is felt to be 'coherent' depends on how and where events take place

Not just any sort of spatialized event is privileged, at least within the Hollywood system. Heath singles out 'the look' as an agent of spatial and narrative organization 'The look', he writes, 'joins form of expression – the composition of the images and their disposition in relation to one another – and form of content – the definition of the action of the film in the movement of looks, exchanges, objects seen, and so on'<sup>31</sup> Carroll faults Heath's argument here on the grounds that not all narrative events require characters or emphasize the look.<sup>32</sup> This complaint is beside the point. Heath plainly aims to move away from a consideration of narrative in general toward a concrete discussion of how the most ordinary sorts of film stories occur<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, a problem does emerge in his attempt to use character looks to establish a dialectic between form and content 'The look', he tells us, mediates between one form, according to which images are composed and articulated, and another, a form that defines the look itself as event One wonders how the look can mediate a relationship to which it is itself a party It could function in this way only if somehow distinguished from the other two terms – for example, as a particular content that each form strives to render And while it is easy to see how 'the look' as content might be distinguished from the rules of continuity editing, it is not clear from Heath's text how 'the look' should be distinguished from and related to those narrative conventions that allow it to tell the story

Once he has pinned everything to the look, that is, one might expect Heath to consider how and why ordinary movies favour the particular sorts of looks they do The analysis at this point cries out for a description of the 'form of content' according to which particular kinds of looks signify as narrative events And Heath promises just that in his subsequent discussion of the point-of-view

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p 46

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Carroll Address to the Heathen

<sup>33</sup> As Heath himself explains in reply to Carroll 'La Père Noël October no 26 (1983) pp 63–115

34 Heath cites Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973) and Edward Branigan, 'Formal permutations of the point-of-view shot', *Screen* vol. 16 no. 3 (1975) pp. 54–64. See also Branigan's *Point of View in the Cinema: a Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (New York: Mouton, 1984).

shot. There, he draws on Burch and Edward Branigan to describe a typology of shots considered relatively 'objective' or 'subjective', plausibly or implausibly associated with a human point of view.<sup>34</sup> Collapsed into types of shots, however, 'the look' becomes 'form of expression' once more. Accordingly, Heath's analysis of the point-of-view shot quickly becomes a consideration not of who looks at whom and how, but of where the camera is placed in relationship to the actor – the degree to which it occupies a position where the character would have been. Thus it falls short of his promise to provide a concept that would mediate between the form of expression and the form of content.

In sum, when Heath calls attention to the narrative importance of character looks, he refutes a formalist position that finds spatial coherence in principles such as continuity editing alone. He establishes, on the contrary, that the prevailing rendition of 'narrative space' depends upon character looks, which are necessary to join the 'form of expression' and the 'form of content'. Yet he too quickly eschews consideration of the particular sorts of looks favoured by Hollywood cinema. When his discussion retreats to the importance of camera placement relative to character, it fails to consider what such placement has to do with the kinds of narratives Hollywood likes to tell. Thus Heath urges a question he cannot answer: how exactly do character looks organize cinematic space?

### The narrative of space

As I have already suggested, the answer lies in an examination of Hollywood's most conventional content, namely, those images through which films demonstrate true love. The authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* estimate that ninety-five per cent of all US films released between 1915 and 1960 include a romance plot. Noting that this 'is not startling news', they provide the obligatory reminder that such stories stem from 'the chivalric romance, the bourgeois novel, and the American melodrama'. They also suggest that Hollywood cinema may be distinguished from these forms by the degree to which it makes all subplots 'causally related to the romantic action'. Yet they do not discuss how Hollywood's universalizing romance proceeds visually on screen, perhaps expecting that their readers will conjure images of lovers so familiar as to need no further comment.<sup>35</sup> If the image of the luminous heroine reunited with the leading man springs most quickly to mind, one would also do well to recall the separation that enables this reunion. When the steady gaze of the leading woman meets that of the leading man, we are to understand that they have been drawn together by powerful forces indeed. Their shared look testifies to the sincerity of their mutual emotion and its power to endure. In this

35 Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 16.

way, their togetherness equals resolution. It can do so precisely because these two characters spend time apart. The conventions of Hollywood romance narrative are quite unintelligible under the rubric of a singular 'diegetic space'. The story *takes place* precisely by distinguishing the spaces the lovers inhabit. Through myriad iterations, the Hollywood love story presents and resolves a spatial problem.

The 1993 hit romance *Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron) provides a particularly noteworthy example. The genius of the film lies in its insistence on maintaining the separation of the couple until the last possible moment. The film nears resolution as Sam (Tom Hanks) and Annie (Meg Ryan) race to their rendezvous on top of the Empire State Building. Just when it seems the two might finally occupy the same space, elevator doors close on Sam and son Jonah and, immediately after, open to release Annie onto the now vacant observation deck. By this point, the film has repeatedly raised, and frustrated, the expectation that Annie and Sam will be brought together. The distance separating East Coast from West, barriers to movement and vision such as highway traffic, wistful looks at other partners, reminders of the hazardous street crossing in *An Affair to Remember* (Leo McCarey, 1957) – all these and more intervene to keep the two apart. Accordingly, the elevator images stretch to the point of exasperation our sense that only happenstance keeps the couple from forming. The filmmakers clearly anticipated that such a strategy would intensify their audience's desire to see love realized in the final scene. They manipulate well-established visual conventions to render the partners' first true meeting as a fulfillment of their destiny. *Sleepless in Seattle* repeatedly promises to connect the lovers' eyelines and relentlessly pulls them apart. In this way, it establishes that to know love, Sam and Annie have only to meet.

In order for them to get together, however, a particular type of space has to be created. *Sleepless in Seattle* reiterates the sort of the utopian space lovers have occupied (or dramatically failed to occupy) since the very beginnings of the feature film. All such spaces share the same key components. They are evenly illuminated. Areas of darkness are not so pronounced as to introduce a spatial division between 'the light' and 'the darkness', from which a threat might emerge. Similarly, the space has been cleared of obstructions that might interfere with the lovers' shared look. *Sleepless in Seattle's* final scene, for instance, differs from earlier manifestations of the observation deck in which crowds of tourists obstruct Sam's search for Jonah. In contrast, when Sam's eyes finally do meet Annie's it is as if an invisible thread connects them and draws them together across the space. Little moves apart from the lovers themselves, and nothing intervenes to thwart full recognition. When Sam and Annie speak their perfunctory introductions, it is clear that words could not capture the bond that unites them. Precisely put, the hero and heroine

36 On the illumination of this white face see Richard Dyer *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997). For a more detailed description of its conventional features see Virginia Wright Wexman *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 16–19.

37 Urging us beyond the opposition of feminine spectacle and masculine narrative established by Laura Mulvey 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' *Screen* vol. 16 no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18.

38 The indispensable discussions of the woman's face as epistemological problem are Mary Ann Doane 'Veiling over desire: close ups of the woman', in *Femmes Fatales* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 44–75, Linda Williams *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

are 'part of', rather than 'within', this space of safety, which could not exist as such apart from their presence.

It takes two faces to produce the space of the happy ending, but the face of the white woman is a particularly decisive feature. It receives special treatment both to distinguish it from the man's visage and to make it appear a more authentic source of feeling.<sup>36</sup> Annie's is the more brightly and evenly illuminated face. It receives closer framing and presents a broader range of changes in the eyes and mouth, its most expressive features. Accordingly, the camera lingers there longer. As it lingers, the most minute variations of her face provide crucial information about space in which it is embedded. Were she merely to bat her eyelashes, for instance, this could break the gaze and set in motion another sequence of spatial transformations. Far from interrupting the narrative of *Sleepless in Seattle*, spectacular display of Annie's face constitutes the main axis of its development.<sup>37</sup> It is within visual narrative that the woman's face becomes an especially desirable object to see and to know.<sup>38</sup>

A wide variety of shots can serve to render the right woman looking at the right man. There is no single technique for framing the look of love, in other words, though many of the production techniques most characteristic of Hollywood continuity are particularly suited to showing it (among them, shot/reverse-shot editing, the closeup and three-point lighting). *Sleepless in Seattle* joins Sam and Annie's look first across the limits of the frame, then within them in a long-shot that tracks with Sam as he walks towards Annie to frame the couple at last in medium two-shot. But it is not difficult to locate other ways of putting together the same sort of sequence. Because the look itself is the common denominator in any number of different ways of framing it, it makes sense to argue that Hollywood's formal characteristics developed in the service of this content, rather than the other way around. Regardless, the look of love cannot exist apart from expressive form, nor could it have gained ready intelligibility in isolation from a whole system of spatialized looks. The couple's gaze signifies true love precisely through its difference not only from those longing looks that underscore the separation of the partners, but also from Annie's glances into the face of the wrong man in a scene preceding the finale. Ample light illuminates the table Annie shares with Bill (Bill Pullman), and nothing obstructs their eyeline. But Annie refuses to hold Bill's gaze. Though this space includes almost all the elements that will define the final space of safety, Annie's distraction precludes resolution. A gigantic red heart illuminates the side of the Empire State Building in the window behind them, capturing her gaze and propelling the narrative forward. If one had to pick a single look to answer Heath's call for a mediating term conjoining form of expression and form of content, then, it would surely be the heroine's look at the deserving man.

The final images of *Sleepless in Seattle* make plain the spatial problem at stake in this mutual stare. Annie and Sam walk off the observation deck and through the lobby that leads back to the elevator. Though they hold hands, their eyeline provides the primary connection between them. Their look barely falters as they move through doorways and it endures even as the elevator's doors enclose them. Jonah smiles broadly at the camera as if to confirm that nothing remains that might sunder their look – certainly he will not distract them. The formerly disparate spaces that hindered the formation of the couple can now be understood as aspects of single, endlessly expansive space where love can flourish and that, retrospectively, allowed it to be born in the first place. Though potentially infinite, the utopian space engendered by the end of this film is necessarily American. *Sleepless in Seattle* makes this nationalism explicit through repeated images of the lovers' progress back and forth across a colourful map of the USA with blackness outside its borders – absent America, the void. It is only fitting, then, that the conclusion would occur on top of the Empire State Building, a cinematic monument to modern America if ever there was one. Regardless of the particular location, however, it is the abolition of spatial difference that brings the love story to an end. To resituate the couple in a cluttered or dimly illuminated space would be to call for further spatial transformations and would jar the neat conjunction of heterosexual fulfillment and national exemplarity. *Sleepless in Seattle* works so hard to produce. Up until this point, the proliferation of out-of-frame space serves the purposes both of style and of narrative. The more spatial differences that threaten the couple, the better. Only as the film approaches narrative resolution must barriers be breached and reestablished in such a way as to generate a homogeneous, safe space for the romantic couple. In other words, the coherent, unified space we have been calling 'the diegesis' is less a precondition of Hollywood's favourite narrative than its goal.

Heath, then, is guilty of same oversight for which Levi-Strauss chided Propp, that of not being formalist enough.<sup>39</sup> At the highest level of abstraction, he persists in deriving his spatial model from a 'form of expression' that generates excessive offscreen space independently from any content, he then treats 'content' as if it matters only in as much as it helps to contain the problems of excess space posed by expressive form. In contrast, I have argued that the form and content of Hollywood's most conventional stories work together to conjure spatial 'excess'. The love story evokes a multiplicity of spaces in order to make spatial homogeneity equal safety, destiny and resolution. For this reason, it makes sense to say that Hollywood filmmaking works less to 'contain' spatial excess than to classify, transform and arrange the potentially infinite spaces it evokes – to narrate space. In retrospect, it should seem ironic that

39 Claude Levi-Strauss 'Reflections on a work of Vladimir Propp' in *Structural Anthropology* Volume II trans. Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

the kind of film theory most obsessed with the question of 'the spectator' relied on production units – shots – rather than reception units – spaces – to develop its account of film form and to pose the question of film ideology. In order to set moviegoers back on their feet, we must displace the shot from its long-held, privileged position in film theory and take more seriously than even Heath himself does his suggestion that cinema's most conventional narratives are also its most conventional spatial arrangements.

### History and narrative address

Such a move might finally banish the spectre of Lewis Jacob's 1939 history, *The Rise of American Film*<sup>40</sup> True, serious historians no longer repeat Jacob's contention that a series of technical innovations by artistic geniuses led swiftly and logically to the Hollywood feature Still, the development of filmmaking technique continues to organize the most important accounts, and with it, the names Edwin S Porter and D W Griffith. Indeed, the procedures for framing and articulating shots associated with these two directors arguably provide stronger historical markers at the beginning of the twenty-first century than in they did in the 1930s Production methods have come to distinguish early cinema from the feature film as entirely different forms of filmmaking On the basis of that distinction, Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger associate classical style with corporate production, and Miriam Hansen describes how feature film narrative was able 'to anticipate a viewer through particular textual strategies, and thus to standardize empirically diverse and to some extent unpredictable acts of reception'<sup>41</sup> Although I cannot pursue the matter in great detail here, I would like to suggest why commitment to a shot-based account of form inhibits further development of this line of historical argument To do so, it only makes sense to revisit Noel Burch's pioneering description of the break that separates 'primitive' from 'institutional' modes of cinematic representation<sup>42</sup>

Porter's 1903 *Life of an American Fireman* provides Burch's key example Jacobs had credited the film with intercutting interior and exterior shots to depict the fireman's rescue of woman and child. This apparently early instance of parallel editing supports his argument that Porter propelled US film towards its destiny in the feature. In the 1970s, however, researchers established that Jacob's conclusions were based on an altered version of the film. As seen in 1903, *Life of an American Fireman* would have presented interior and exterior shots in series.<sup>43</sup> Burch takes full advantage of this revision to alienate the norms of early filmmaking from those that appeared natural and inevitable to Jacobs. The difference, he argues, is that each set of conventions assumes a different sort of viewer As

<sup>40</sup> Lewis Jacobs *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939)

<sup>41</sup> Miriam Hansen *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 16

<sup>42</sup> Noel Burch, 'Primitivism and the avant-garde: a dialectical approach' in *Narrative Apparatus: Ideology* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) pp. 483–506 See also Burch *Life to those Shadows*

<sup>43</sup> In addition to Burch see André Gaudreault 'Detours in film narrative: the development of cross-cutting' in Elsaesser and Barker (eds) *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* pp. 133–50, Charles Musser 'The early cinema of Edwin Porter' *Cinema Journal* vol. 19, no. 1 (1979) pp. 1–38

he describes it. Porter's original version shows the same action twice, but from different camera positions. It therefore expects audiences to do most of the work required to understand discontinuous actions as aspects of a single event. In this, *Life of an American Fireman* may be considered typical of a primitive mode of representation also characterized by the following: each shot appears to stand on its own, significant action is distributed across the frame rather than being pinpointed for the spectator, distanced framing does not communicate the psychological complexity that closeups can. In all these ways, early cinema presupposes a viewer 'external' to the world of its story. In contrast, Hollywood identifies the spectator's point of view with that of the camera, thereby effacing its own powers of narration and moving the viewer 'inside' a singular diegetic space.

By showing that two different structures are in play, Burch effectively – and invaluable – refutes any theory of film history that would attribute the development of cinematic conventions to an individual filmmaker, the technology of the motion picture camera, or the profit motive *per se*. In place of such monocausal accounts of Hollywood's development, he insists that we attend to the historical discontinuity that separates the earlier form of address from its successor. As alien as the two modes of filmmaking and spectatorship are to one another, however, the latter arrives as if in fulfillment of a prophecy made by the novel. As Burch explains it, the *habitués* of the feature film who modified *Life of an American Fireman* 'clearly sensed' that it provides 'a very early anaphore of camera ubiquity' in its impulse to convey simultaneous action in discrete locations. This impulse 'corresponded so easily and naturally to the most commonplace novelistic procedure – 'Quickly the fireman climbed the ladder, *semi-colon*, inside the room he saw the inanimate woman on the bed' – *that it could be formulated on paper when it could not be on film*'.<sup>44</sup> Herein lies a paradox, but not, I believe, the one Burch himself identifies. Burch acknowledges the tension between, on the one hand, his argument against a teleological conception of film history and, on the other, his claim that the novel provides a paradigm for cinema's institutionally dominant mode. He fails to consider, however, that this contradiction derives from the effort to ground cinema history in an ahistorical conception of narrative form. It stems, in other words, from the supposition that while film 'itself' is a historically new phenomenon, 'the story' told by *Life of an American Fireman* is one that can be told on paper, and that the cut that is 'missing' from its original version had a ready counterpart in verbal syntax. Burch bequeathed this assumption to a range of subsequent historians who, despite widely divergent approaches to spectatorship, describe Porter as repeating action and thereby estrange early film from a narrative model assumed both to follow it and to precede it by a century or more.<sup>45</sup>

44 Burch 'Primitivism and the avant-gardes' pp. 493–4 (emphasis his)

45 Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger *Classical Hollywood Cinema* p. 162; Bowser *Transformation of Cinema*, p. 53; Hansen *Babel and Babylon* p. 306; Tom Gunning updates Burch's argument by challenging the idea of a sharp break between Burch's primitive and institutional modes of representation. For a summary of the revision see Gunning 'Aesthetic of astonishment' in Linda Williams (ed.) *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

In a concrete sense, there is no repeated action. The fireman completes entirely different sets of movements in each shot. First, in the smoke-filled interior, our imperiled heroine rushes away from the camera to a window at screen left, then, overcome by smoke, she turns and collapses on a bed in the foreground. The heroic fireman enters from the right, crosses the frame to break the window, collects the limp woman and carries her out through the bright aperture. Returning through the window after a brief pause, he retrieves an infant amidst thick smoke before exiting the window once more. Next, in the exterior shot, the second-storey window briefly frames the woman's frantic face. Below, the heroic fireman breaks through the front door, while other firemen place a ladder below the window and still others spray the house with water. Our hero carries the woman down the ladder, she revives and emphatically gestures that her child is in the room. The fireman mounts the ladder and returns with the child. All three are grouped together near the centre of the frame. Not only are the actions not repeated, but the order of the shots matters a great deal. It could not be reversed without changing the story. We might imagine yet a third version of the film in which the well-illuminated exterior shot that reunites mother and child gives way to the smoke-filled interior of the firemen heroically battling the blaze. Such a finale could only undo the modest closure achieved by the preceding shot: do the firemen succeed or remain trapped inside? Is this a story of rescue or a dramatic testament to the hazardous life of firemen, one that cries out, perhaps in a sequel, for their safe return to the station house? The instant our critical attention shifts to the spatial differences indicated by the *mise-en-scène*, in other words, it becomes clear that each shot figures a complimentary relationship between inside and outside in order to stage a competition between the two. The two shots each depict two distinct spaces and at the same time insist on a permeable barrier between them. The window serves in the interior shot to indicate the space from which rescue may come and in the exterior shot to indicate a still dangerous space inside. Once staged in this manner it becomes clear that, in order for rescue to occur, the outside must win.

It follows that the rising feature film cannot have rejected repetition in favour of a return to the smooth progression of novelistic narrative. Rather, it must have replaced one form of spatial competition with another. Consider D.W. Griffith's 1913 *Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, which provides an early example of the conventions *Sleepless in Seattle* so deftly manipulates and reproduces. As in Porter's film, Griffith's finale places our heroine (Lillian Gish) in a smoke-filled room. Here, however, no simple triumph of outside over inside will suffice to rescue her and her child. Rather, a wholesale transformation of relationships among a diverse set of spaces must occur. Indeed, *Battle at Elderbush Gulch* provides no clear-cut distinction between interior peril and exterior

safety Outside, Indians circle the cabin and threaten to penetrate its protective enclosure – crosscutting and mise-en-scene collaborate to make interior hazard appear as an extension of this exterior threat Counterposed to the impending invasion of the cabin by hostile outsiders, moreover, is a competing ‘outside’ from which rescue will come *Battle at Elderbush Gulch* establishes another exterior space, further removed from the cabin, from which the cavalry is summoned And there is still another crucial exterior location, one occupied by the young husband, tragically separated from our heroine by the Indian onslaught in a prior scene Moving en masse in its ride to the rescue, the cavalry sweeps up the husband, clears the screen of the ring of Indian attackers, and deposits him on the cabin’s doorstep In this manner, its arrival promises not simply rescue but the ‘restoration’ of an original whole, signified, in typical fashion, by the couple’s reunion Yet even the emphatic removal of the natives will not suffice to bring the family together *Battle at Elderbush Gulch* introduces a further complication to be resolved once the smoke clears Nestled within the besieged cabin, a large trunk hides the couples’ infant child and the adolescent sisters who safeguard it As the trunk’s lid pops open to reveal its precious, miraculously preserved contents, the final obstacle to reunion is removed<sup>46</sup> To generate a picture of the whole, then, requires not simply that the exterior supplant that interior, or vice versa, but the transformation of relationships among a large number of spaces

Unlike *Life of an American Fireman*, when *Battle at Elderbush Gulch* sets any two given spaces in competition it inevitably demonstrates their interdependence and thus insists that a qualitative change in each will be necessary if we are to have narrative closure Precisely because of this, Griffith’s film seems much more ‘resolved’ than Porter’s, at the end, no loose ends remain All spaces, interior and exterior, have been made safe – as if the entire space of ‘the West,’ has been secured for the nuclear family This resolution, like that of *Sleepless in Seattle*, depends upon the establishment of a well-illuminated, potentially infinite space that has been cleared of all obstacles to the movement and vision of a white man and woman in love

The change in narration that these films of 1903 and 1913 represent must have made all the difference for audiences, but we will not grasp the shift through Burch’s metaphors of inside and out Those metaphors lead Burch to echo Metz’s contention that the feature film ideologically equates the spectator with the narrating agent Once properly understood in spatial terms, however, the difference between *Life of an American Fireman* and *Battle at Elderbush Gulch* supports more nearly the opposite conclusion It is Porter’s movie, not Griffith’s, that encourages viewers to understand cinematic narration as something an individual human could and should do Shifting its vantage from outside to inside and back again,

46 These observations are indebted to Kristen Whissel ‘Narrative space and national space in the silent cinema’s transitional period’ SCS Conference West Palm Beach Florida April 1999

*Life of an American Fireman* tells a story in which the outside triumphs. Its crucial window demonstrates that exterior and interior are continuous and leaves no doubt about what it means to pass from one space to the other. By implication, its narrative agent has a limited power to see across the boundary and can handle only one such boundary at a time. Accordingly, one might well confuse the narrator with 'the cameraman' or consider it to be a personage similar to the fireman whose story it tells.<sup>47</sup> Placement within space necessarily limits vision and knowledge to that space, but such limitation does not preclude an individual from adequately understanding the relationship between one space and another.

The feature film made this seem a quaint notion. In Griffith's film as in Ephron's, no figure within a space could possibly see and arrange the spatial relationships narrative puts in play. Tom Gunning has characterized Griffith's contribution to the feature-film's 'narrator-system' in similar terms. He reminds us that parallel editing *per se* will not suffice as a historical marker of that system. The alternation of two discrete lines of action was already conventional in the chase film when Griffith began directing in 1908. The decisive change came, according to Gunning, once Griffith used that technique to interrupt actions 'at a point of intensity' and to imply a psychological connection between characters who could not see one another.<sup>48</sup> Through its power to establish such connections, a filmic narrator was distinguished from the cameraman's ability to record actions and the editor's ability to link one action to the next. Griffith's 1908 adaptation of Alfred Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden' provide perhaps the earliest example.<sup>49</sup> There, the instant the shipwrecked husband raises his wife's locket to his lips, we cut to an image of the wife, at home in England, extending her arms as if to embrace him. In the process of demonstrating that 'devotion overcomes geography', Gunning observes, Griffith creates 'an omniscient narrator, who unites on the screen what is separate in the space of the story'.<sup>50</sup> Gunning reproduces the notion of a singular diegesis, but his description makes no sense unless one acknowledges that the visual field has been subdivided into distinct spaces. As evidenced by its more mature development in *Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, the narrator-system multiplies such divisions in order to overcome them. Accordingly, to distil love from spatial difference requires an agent not remotely similar to the embodied vision it represents. This agent cannot itself belong to any particular space, but must be an abstract and decidedly noncorporeal presence hovering outside the manipulation of the visual field. As Gunning points out, most accounts of feature film narration founder on this point and attempt to turn the narrator back into an anthropomorphic entity. Thus, acknowledgment that 'the narrator' cannot be human compels Bordwell to contend that films need have no narrator whatsoever, Metz to impute narrative power to the spectator's

47 Musser 'The early cinema of Edwin Porter'

48 Tom Gunning *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of the American Narrative Film: the Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991) p. 114

49 *After Many Years* (D.W. Griffith Biograph, 1908)

50 Gunning *D.W. Griffith* p. 113

identification with the camera, and partisans of the auteur to confuse the narrator with the author-function it historically helped to create<sup>51</sup>

No doubt the removal of obstacles to knowledge, desire and vision in the Hollywood happy ending encourages the fantasy that the camera's vantage, the character's look, and the spectator's view may somehow coincide. But we will not understand the structure of this fantasy through idealized models of narrative and filmmaking technique. What makes it so manifestly fantastic is not the phenomenological similarity between images and a purportedly unmediated vision, but the fact that Hollywood's visual narratives themselves insist on the limitations of any embodied point of view. Because sightlines are limited within space, to make individuals secure requires a noncorporeal agent capable of ordering a wide array of spatial relationships. It is this formulation, I propose, that ultimately will explain how the rising feature film interpellated a mass audience and, furthermore, what that act of interpellation had to do with the authority of the corporate institutions that produced it.

# Italy's landscapes of loss: historical mourning and the dialectical image in *Cinema Paradiso*, *Mediterraneo* and *Il Postino*

ROSALIND GALT

*Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988), *Mediterraneo* (Gabriele Salvatores, 1991) and *Il Postino* (Michael Radford, 1995) are strikingly similar films: released within a few years of each other, all are historical romantic melodramas, focusing on young Italian men and set around the end of World War II. In the context of contemporary European film production, all three can be considered as heritage cinema, a genre characterized in part by modes of production and distribution, but also by historical narratives, thematics of national nostalgia and spectacular mises-en-scene. In all these three films, the mise-en-scene in question is landscape, where images of rural Italian and Mediterranean land and seascapes form one of the key pleasures of the texts. However, these pleasures are far from simple, and the landscape image in postwar European cinema creates a nexus of meanings around representation and politics that is both culturally potent and inevitably tinged with suspicion. Despite counter-examples such as neorealism, which attempted to reclaim Italian space for an anti-Fascist identity, critical understanding of the spectacular landscape image has combined historical concern for the politics of its spatializing rhetoric with a more contemporary Marxist critique of the aesthetics of style and surface. However, I would suggest that landscape images in film allow an investigation of this relationship of cinematic to political

space. Insofar as landscape as a mode of spectacle provokes questions of indexicality, the materiality of the profilmic, and the historicity of the image. In analyzing these three films, I want to think about the specificity of landscape images in cinematic terms: to read mise-en-scene as an ideological articulation of space and as a staging of Italian history that is historically punctual and politically complex.

The appellation 'heritage film' is itself somewhat ideologically loaded: many critics of the genre see it as reactionary, a reading that is based frequently on a Jamesonian critique of the spectacular image as nostalgic, sentimental and lacking in historical depth.<sup>1</sup> Susannah Radstone, for example, reads *Cinema Paradiso* as postmodern nostalgia, offering a conventional pop-cultural version of history instead of a more genuine relation to the experience of the past.<sup>2</sup> In a more general context, critics of the heritage film, such as Andrew Higson, offer an ideological critique in which the pleasures of the spectacular mise-en-scene gloss over any political edge that narratives of class conflict might have contained.<sup>3</sup> Although these arguments are theoretically different, there is implicit in each a sense of anxiety around the image, and around the spectacular image as historical. In opposition to this logic, my claim in this essay is that these three films deploy the spectacular pleasures of the Italian landscape to construct a re-evaluation and a re-experiencing of Italian postwar history, creating in the process a complex historical temporality and a dialectical relation to the landscape image.

Before I discuss the question of the image, I want to look at the relationship between history and narrative in these films, for it is in this relation that the foundations are laid for the visual strategies I will be tracing. If these films are popularly viewed as offering a rose-tinted view of the past, it is only a lack of attention to Italian political history that allows critics to dispose of them in this way as apolitical or historically empty. I want to argue instead that the films are doubly structured by a leftist reading of Italian political history and by a displacement of this politics onto romance. This structure offers a reading not only of the postwar moment in which the films are set, but also of the historical moment of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the films were made, and from which specific perspective this projected narrative of romantic loss makes political sense.

For Italy, the postwar years were a crucial period in which a struggle took place over Italian national identity, concluding in 1948 with the formation of the First Republic. The breakup of the unified antifascist Resistance, the defeat of the Communist Party (PCI) and the victory of the rightist Christian Democrats (DC) speaks of a moment that is far from safely nostalgic for Italians, and is in fact more fraught than a reiteration of a fascism that can be universally condemned. And, while fascism may have been a crucial topic for

1 Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

2 Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema/memory/history', *Screen* vol. 36, no. 1 (1995), pp. 34–47.

3 Andrew Higson 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: University College London Press, 1993), p. 119.

4 See for example *The Conformist* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1969) *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini 1973) and *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (Francesco Rosi 1979)

5 Lawrence Gray 'From Gramsci to Togliatti: the partito nuovo and the mass basis of Italian Communism' in Simon Serfaty and Lawrence Gray (eds) *The Italian Communist Party Yesterday Today and Tomorrow* (Westport CT Greenwood Press 1980) pp 21–36

6 See for example, Paul Ginsborg's somewhat leftist overview *A History of Contemporary Italy Society and Politics 1943–1988* (London Penguin 1990) also Norman Kogan *A Political History of Postwar Italy* (New York Praeger 1981) S J Woolf (ed.) *The Rebirth of Italy 1943–50* (New York Humanities Press 1972) Spencer M Di Scala *Italy From Revolution to Republic* second edition (Boulder CA Westview Press 1998)

Italian cinema in the 1960s and 1970s, when the war was first being reconsidered in European culture.<sup>4</sup> I would argue that 1945–8 became an equally compelling era in the early 1990s, when the postwar Republic came under increasing pressure and finally, in 1992, collapsed altogether

For the Italian Left, the key historical question has not been 'how did we allow fascism to happen?' but rather 'what went wrong after the war?'. The partition of Italy produced a strong partisan coalition that, by the end of the war, was discussing with the PCI the role of democratic socialism in the new order.<sup>5</sup> As the new constitution was drawn up in 1946, there was a moment of unique opportunity in which political parties were being created anew, and to speak of an entirely new nation appeared to be no exaggeration. This exhilaration was most evident in the Left which, as the mainstay of the Resistance, pushed successfully for a left-leaning coalition government in 1945. But this spirit of optimism was short-lived. As well as refusing to institute any of the government's more radical plans, the US-backed DC ensured that ex-Fascists remained in their posts and few major political changes took place.<sup>6</sup> By 1948, the PCI was losing popular support and in the April elections the DC won a landslide victory. They were to remain in power, almost without interruption, for the next forty-five years.

The political impact of these years is explicitly present in the films, readable at the edges of the mise-en-scene and in the peripheries of the narratives. *Mediterraneo* describes the feeling of postwar optimism among its rescued soldiers, verbalizing this concept quite directly through the characters of La Rosa and Lo Russo. Thus, when La Rosa arrives by plane and tells the soldiers the news of Mussolini's fall, Italy's division and of joining forces with the Allies, he adds, 'there is much to do, we can't remain outside of it. There are big ideals at stake.' And even more directly expressing PCI sentiments, Lo Russo tries to persuade Farina to come back to Italy with him by telling him that Italy 'needs rebuilding from the ground up – we'll build a great nation, I promise you'. And in *Il Postino*, the rightwing's fear of the PCI is visible in one shot of the village in which a DC election poster is seen towards the edge of the screen, its image a hammer and sickle, its slogan 'because this isn't your flag'.

However, the relation of the films to political events is not primarily contained in these few direct references, but is structured through a projection of politics onto romance. In each film, the moment of political possibility can be thought of directly only as a moment of romantic possibility, which becomes a nostalgic narrative of romantic loss. In *Cinema Paradiso*, Totò falls in love with the unreachable Elena – his affair with her is brief, but he never entirely gets over her. In *Il Postino* the connection is more explicit, as the film's displacement of politics onto romance is enacted as the tension

between Mario and his Communist boss over the meaning of Pablo Neruda. Whereas Mario is infatuated with the idea of Neruda as a Romantic artist, the 'poet loved by women', his boss insists on him as the poet 'loved by the people'.

This deflection enables the films to represent the political mood of 1945, but to do so from a historically-specific viewpoint, that of the time the films were made. For the sake of brevity I will refer to this as the early 1990s, although the films' release dates span from 1988 to 1995.<sup>7</sup> That all three films should be made within a few years of one another, and that they should all deploy narratives of romantic loss to imagine the postwar years, is symptomatic not so much of the continuing influence of the postwar period in Italian cultural memory, but of a more precise shift in the relationship between this particular history and the films' present. This shift, which made a reimagining of the postwar years newly compelling and newly painful, was the collapse in 1992 of the Italian First Republic.

Italy had been governed since 1948 by a system unique in Europe: a constitutional democracy in which, despite free elections, there was no real change of government. As Sarah Waters has argued, Italy operated in a permanent and curiously stable state of crisis in which coalition governments rose and fell with startling frequency, but remained composed of all the same politicians.<sup>8</sup> The system worked principally to keep the PCI out of office, and it did so successfully by ensuring that the other two main parties, the DC and PSI, constantly entered into subtly changing coalitions. The Cold War fear of Communism partly structured this oligopoly, but it was also composed of a corrupt corporatist bureaucracy. The fact that power never changed into opposition hands enabled this system to grow unchecked, and by the 1980s the *partitocrazia*, the rule of the parties, was taken for granted as the definition of the Italian state.

This system fell apart suddenly in 1992, following the huge *mani pulite* bribery scandal in which much of the Italian ruling elite was implicated.<sup>9</sup> All but one of the political parties of the postwar era collapsed, the PCI having already reformed itself into the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) the previous year. The collapse was not only of political parties, but of the entire modern Italian state. Umberto Eco compared the crisis to the French Revolution<sup>10</sup> and Federico Fellini said that, 'All of us must reflect on what the Italian identity really means'.<sup>11</sup> It is in this climate that *Cinema Paradiso*, *Mediterraneo* and *Il Postino* were released, and placed in this context their look back to the immediate postwar years takes on a different valence. The national anxiety attending the end of the First Republic forces a return to the moment of its inception, and the Leftist question of 'what went wrong?' is able to be articulated for the first time as a question of national significance.

It is for this reason that these films about the postwar years appear when they do, but this crisis of national identity also offers an

7 *Cinema Paradiso* was released in 1988, *Mediterraneo* in 1991 and *Il Postino* in 1995. The fact that two of these were released before the emergence of the *mani pulite* crisis prevents them from being read simply as a displaced reaction to political events. Rather their narrativization of a need to look back to the postwar years functions as part of the cultural shift that led up to the collapse of the First Republic, and indeed set the conditions within which the breakdown could become possible.

8 Sarah Waters, 'Tangentopoli and the emergence of a new political order in Italy', *West European Politics* vol. 17 no. 1 (1994) pp. 169–82.

9 For more details on the crisis see Bufacchi and Burgess, *Italy Since 1989: Events and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998). Martin Bull and Martin Rhodes, 'Between crisis and transition: Italian politics in the 1990s', *West European Politics* vol. 20 no. 1 (1997) pp. 1–13. Donald Sassoon, 'Tangentopoli or the democratization of corruption: considerations on the end of Italy's First Republic', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* vol. 1 no. 1 (1995) pp. 124–43. Mark Gilbert, *The Italian Revolution: the End of Politics, Italian Style?* (Boulder and San Francisco, CA: and Oxford: Westview Press, 1995).

10 Bufacchi and Burgess, *Italy Since 1989* p. 1 fn. 12.

11 Federico Fellini quoted in Michael Sheridan, 'Revolution Italian-style', *Vanity Fair* July 1993 pp. 46–53.

explanation of why they take the *form* that they do. From the standpoint of the 1990s, 1945 signifies the moment of possibility that fails. Thus, for films to reimagine those years does entail a certain nostalgia, a yearning for the moment when a different outcome was still possible. But, contrary to the criticisms that accuse the films of using nostalgia to produce a stable and reactionary relation to history, the combination of 1945 and 1992 sets up a dynamic relation between past and present, in which nostalgia subtends a historical and political critique. This is why both *Mediterraneo* and *Cinema Paradiso* include sequences set in the present, in which their postwar romances are nostalgically revisited from a place of present-day loss. Totò in *Cinema Paradiso* watches his old films of Elena, knowing that he has never recaptured such happiness, and the lieutenant in *Mediterraneo* returns to the island where he discovers that Vassilissa has died. This loss is also articulated as directly political in *Mediterraneo*, where the Communist Lo Russo has returned to the Greek island, decades after promising to build a new Italy. He tells Farina, 'Life wasn't so good in Italy. They didn't let us change anything. So I told them. You win but don't consider me an accomplice.' This moment acts as a coda to the character's earlier optimism, but the weight of the relationship between these historical spaces cannot be borne by such direct references. Instead, such nostalgia for the moment of possibility, combined with knowledge of its inevitable failure, can only be represented in a form able to structure history in terms of loss and mourning, knowledge and desire: in other words, as melodrama.

If the pleasures of the melodramatic narrative entail a mourning for the losses of the historical Left, the pleasurable image in these films does similar work. The anxiety around the image in the criticism of these films contains a fear of the spectacular that implicitly looks to a formal realism to secure historical authenticity. Mise-en-scene does have a role within this discourse, that of grounding the narrative image accurately, but anything excessive to narrative necessity casts doubt upon the seriousness of the enterprise. Thus, for Jameson, the nostalgic image is too beautiful to be true, and for Higson the so-called 'heritage shots' of aesthetically pleasurable views 'fall out of' the narrative. Each claim about historicity is based on a splitting of the functions of narrative and image, a binary structure in which visual pleasure works only to undermine the possibly radical signification of the historical narrative.

What is striking here is the extent to which this discourse is predicated on the structures of feminist film theory and yet deradicalizes its conception of the image. For clearly Higson's spectacular heritage shots that 'fall out' of the narrative owe a debt to Laura Mulvey,<sup>12</sup> but in a simplified rhetoric in which these moments of spectacular freezing can indicate only a blockage of meaning. Not only is the context of psychoanalytic theory lost, but in

12 Laura Mulvey 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' *Screen* vol. 16 no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18

shifting the terrain from patriarchal images to historical representation, the ideological complexity of spectacle is left behind. For Mulvey, neither spectacle nor narrative are negative simply by refusing meaning, but rather both operate as part of an intensely productive ideological system. And in much feminist theory following Mulvey, the image is a privileged site of contestation, the place where hegemonic meanings can start to break down. Thus, while questions of gender may be peripheral to the narratives of these films, I would argue that the structures of feminist film theory are crucial to theorizing the relation they propose between historical narrative and spectacular mise-en-scene. Against Higson's logic, I would claim that in tandem with analyzing these narratives in terms of mourning and melodrama, it is crucial to theorize as productive the pleasures of their spectacular historical images.

The chief locus of spectacle in these three films is landscape: an Italian rural landscape in *Cinema Paradiso* and *Il Postino*, a Greek island in *Mediterraneo*. Each film was shot on location, and the narratives take place within spaces coded as spectacular: from the sequences in *Il Postino* in which Mario and Neruda talk on the beach, to Totò's walks with the priest along a road overlooking a dramatic shoreline in *Cinema Paradiso*. And, in addition to these narratively motivated locations, there are many instances of shots and sequences that are not motivated, landscape images that indeed 'fall out' of the narrative. This is the case in *Mediterraneo*, which includes montage sequences of the various spaces of the island, unconnected from narrative, providing direct spectatorial engagement with the pleasurable spectacle of landscape.

Within the discourse on spectacle in contemporary film, there is a specific anxiety around landscape images. Landscapes are often read graphically, in what Rosalind Krauss in the photographic context calls a modernist aestheticizing discourse.<sup>13</sup> This can be valorized, say, in the context of art cinema, and indeed is central to the critical construction of 1960s European art film where a nonrealist mise-en-scene is part of a claim to radicality. In postclassical film, art cinematic visual strategies can be central to the location of films as quality products, as for example in the self-consciously aesthetic vistas of *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella, 1996). But this example demonstrates the ease with which the valorising impulse can slip into a fear of pictorialism, producing an 'all style, no depth' criticism. This fear of mise-en-scene, in which landscape becomes readable as a screen blocking a perceived narrative depth, is peculiar to a postclassical cinema in which visual excess has become linked to claims of a 'dumbing-down' process, of deteriorating content.<sup>14</sup> Once again, the image is the site of a lack, a falling away from meaning.

The difficulty, then, is to think landscape outside of this epistemological bind: to read it not as a sliding surface, an aporia of

13 Rosalind Krauss 'Photography's discursive spaces: landscape/view' *Art Journal* vol 42 no 4 (1982) pp 311-19

14 For an example of this kind of criticism see Wheeler Winston Dixon *The Transparency of Spectacle: Meditations on the Moving Image* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

meaning, but rather as a specifically meaningful form of spectacular image. In order to begin to rethink landscape in this way, it is necessary both to bring back to the surface the feminist work that offers a film-specific understanding of the structures underwriting the image, and to analyze what happens differently when the image is not tied to a gendered body. If the female characters in the films can, in classical terms, be seen as images standing for desire, what can landscape as spectacle stand *for*?

One way to address this issue is through the discursive context of another body of Italian films in which landscape became a privileged site of meaning – neorealism. Made mainly between 1945 and 1948, neorealist filmmaking is concurrent with the moment of political optimism mourned by the 1990s films, and represents many of the same geographical spaces. Furthermore, in neorealism, landscape is often claimed to be central to the films' project of reclaiming Italy for an antifascist identity. Thus, for example, *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946) represents Italian resistance and liberation through a series of narratives each set in a different geographical location, while *La Terra Trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) focuses on exploited workers in a rural Sicilian fishing village.

Identifying neorealism with landscape images, director Giuseppe De Santis argues that

If we consider that a great number of films among those most valued belong to a genre in which a landscape has a primordial importance – *White Shadows in the South Seas*, *Tabu*, *Que Viva Mexico*, *Storm over Asia* – then it is clear that the cinema has an even greater need to use the same element of landscape that communicates almost immediately with the spectators who above all want to 'see'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Giuseppe De Santis, 'Per un paesaggio italiano', *Cinema* no. 116 (1941), pp. 71–5. Translation from David Overbey (ed.), *Springtime in Italy: a Reader in Neorealism* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1979), p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> See Mario Cannella, 'Ideology and aesthetic hypotheses in the criticism of neo-realism', *Screen* vol. 14 no. 4 (1974), pp. 5–60.

This formulation is telling, for it implies the next question: what is it that these spectators above all want to see, and what is it that landscape shows them? The obvious answer is that landscape works as part of neorealism's discourse of authenticity, that along with non-professional actors, real locations show the unmediated truth of Italy. However, even without critiquing the ideological basis of this version of realism,<sup>16</sup> it is clear that within De Santis's own discourse, landscape does not show what the spectators want to see, but rather operates similarly to the fetish. For what the spectators of neorealism above all want to see is, depending on your ideological position, the truth of humanity or the truth of exploitation. Not, in any case, the truth of geography. What landscape does show is its own visibility as a scene or a vista: it exists to be looked at, and in its own transparency stands in for a truth that cannot be so easily represented.

It is significant that this claim defining landscape's role as fulfilling a desire to see should come from De Santis, a director

whose most famous film is *Bitter Rice* (1948), in which what is seen is not so much the truth of Italy as the breasts and legs of actress Silvana Mangano. A double slippage takes place here, both from the landscape to the body and from realism to spectacle, and while De Santis writes about the national importance of representing landscape, the film was criticized for its spectacularity, banned in Italy, and became a cult object in Europe and the USA. In this instance, the fetish quality of what the audience wants to see is quite clear, and the image of Mangano's stockinged legs as she stands in the rice paddies combines 'truths' about body and landscape. The spectacular body that operates as stand-in for the truth itself is again a structure analyzed in feminist theory, here reminiscent of Linda Williams's argument that in pornography the excessive visibility of the body is itself a fetish, standing in for an impossible truth of pleasure.<sup>17</sup> The metonymic link from landscape to the female body is a standard one, and *Bitter Rice* exploits this patriarchal connection of woman to nature. So too do the recent films in *Mediterraneo*, two of the soldiers fall for a shepherdess who lives in a rural idyll in the mountains, and Vassilissa is frequently framed in relation to landscape. But if we can read this link in the other direction – that is, to read the Italian landscape as fetishized in a similar way to the female body – then this might open up a useful way of understanding landscape's function. Landscape, like woman, is imagined to be immediate, to communicate directly to those who want, above all, to see.

I want to examine this discourse of visibility and immediacy, which structures the landscape spectacle as a kind of fetish, and to theorize how it produces an affective rhetoric that is also imbricated with historicity. In order to do this, I would like to think about landscape as a central part of theorizations of the cinematic index. From the Lumières' rustling leaves to Bazin's analysis of neorealism<sup>18</sup>, images of landscape have been privileged signifiers of cinema's capacity to touch upon the real. It is this discourse also that underwrites De Santis's call for a *paesaggio italiano*. Of course, this claim on the real can be disputed in a number of ways, and I want to keep in mind my reading of De Santis, that the idea of the 'truth' of landscape operates as a fetish, standing as a figure for a desire that is hidden in plain sight. However, in order to understand how these films structure a relation to history through this mode of apparent immediacy, it will be important to account for the *affective* power of the landscape image, a power which is grounded in the ability of these cinematic images to short-circuit representation.

In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer gives an example in which an actual landscape offers a unique experience of the cinematic. He cites Blaise Cendrars's 'hypothetical experiment', imagining 'two film scenes which are completely identical except for the fact that one has been shot on the Mont Blanc while the other was staged in the

17 Linda Williams *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 1989).

18 André Bazin *What is Cinema?* Volume II, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA and London: University of California Press, 1971).

19 Siegfried Kracauer *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 35

20 Ibid. p. 81

21 Based on his discussion in the *Artwork* essay, one could conclude that Benjamin precludes any experience of the auratic in cinema. However, as Miriam Hansen argues, this negativity is exceptional and in his later writing, Benjamin is more concerned to find the auratic within the modern, as part of his attempt to theorize history outside of progress. See Miriam Hansen, 'Benjamin, cinema and experience: "the blue flower in the land of technology"', *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987), pp. 179–224.

studio. His contention is that the former has a quality not found in the latter. There are on the mountain, says he, certain "emanations, luminous or otherwise, which have worked on the film and given it a soul"<sup>19</sup> Here, the mountain fulfils a similar – although not identical – role to that played in Bazin by the sequence shot or deep focus, by preserving the integrity of profilmic space, it operates fundamentally not as *mise-en-scène* but as a guarantor of the medium's ontological status. In common with Bazin, this conception of realism is tied to temporality, in which the affect – or the 'soul' – of the image derives from its ability to preserve that which was there, the materiality of an object in time.

Kracauer goes on to discuss what happens to the landscape image in a historical film. Here, he argues, there is a conflict in which the indexical landscape image undercuts the historicity of the narrative, breaking the spectator's belief in the diegetic world. His example is Carl Dreyer's *Day of Wrath* (1943), which contains a 'problematic mixture of real trees and period costumes'. Thus, 'The trees form part of endless reality which the camera might picture on and on, while the lovers belong to the orbit of an intrinsically artificial universe. No sooner do the lovers leave it and collide with nature in the raw than the presence of the trees retransforms them into costumed actors.'<sup>20</sup> In this moment of splitting, the indexicality of the trees short-circuits the representational meanings of the narrative space and, in doing so, momentarily replaces historicity with temporality, the time of filming instead of the time of the story. This structure informs the Italian films, where the spectacular landscape vistas are readable as indices, pulling against the historical codes of the *mise-en-scène*.

As Kracauer points out, this effect is at its strongest with a distant history, so does not produce shock in the more recently-set Italian films. Rather, the effect of splitting is refracted across the surface of the text, producing a friction. (An exemplary moment would be the scene in *Cinema Paradiso* where Totò and Elena try to hitch a lift, the pastness of their car momentarily undercut by the effect of the wide shot of a mountain range behind them.) Nonetheless, this idea of a conflict within the frame opens up a productive space within these texts, a tension within the landscape image between its narrative and indexical properties. In order to understand how this tension constitutes an experience of historical mourning that extends that of the films' melodramatic narratives, Kracauer's indexical tension needs to be articulated with a quite different theorization of temporality and the real. Benjamin's concept of the aura. One of Benjamin's most notoriously difficult concepts, the auratic also derives from a momentary effect of the real, but this effect demands to be thought of in terms of temporality and history, experience and politics.<sup>21</sup>

What is striking in the context of my reading is that Benjamin

repeatedly defines the aura via the image of a landscape. In 'A small history of photography' he asks

What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be. While resting on a summer's noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer . . . that is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A small history of photography' in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985), p. 250.

As in the Italian films, the privileged signifier of an affective real is imagined as a long shot, a distanced view of a natural landscape. And, as in the films, this image stands in for something else, both explicitly, where the definition of aura in a historical object is displaced by Benjamin onto a natural one, and implicitly, where, as Miriam Hansen argues in her reading of the concept, a human relation is displaced onto the auratic object.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Hansen, Benjamin, cinema and experience, p. 211.

Hansen points out the seeming disparity between Benjamin's initial definition of the aura in terms of the reciprocity of the gaze and his example that is not human but inanimate. She asks what the human element is in the auratic experience that allows us to apply it to nature. Her answer is 'that forgotten human element . . . is nothing but the material origin – and finality – that humans share with non-human nature'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the mountain and the branch remind us of materiality, temporality and thus ultimately of death. The experience of the aura through landscape offers a sense of history in the abstract, of the pure sense of time, its passing and its inexorability, the shiver of absence that such seeming presence implies. And while for Benjamin this experience is dependent on the presence of the physical space of the landscape, I would argue that it exists in these films, and that rather than defining the spectator's relationship to the apparatus, as in the bourgeois art object, the aura here has become an internal textual effect. The landscape image diffuses across the surface of the films an experience of historical and temporal loss. It is this abstracted loss that grounds the affective structure of the films' mise-en-scene: the landscape of the mountain, the branch and the tree continually breaks out of representation, reminding the spectator that the historical moment of the narratives has passed and can only be looked back on belatedly, from a distance.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 212.

However, if the aura operates to abstract the relationship of the subject to temporality, that relationship is nevertheless always in fact social and its abstraction is necessarily a deflection. Benjamin also describes the aura 'as a projection of a social experience of people onto nature'.<sup>25</sup> The landscape image must not be seen as some kind of immanence, but rather is only able to signify as an abstraction when it is, already, part of a concrete history. Thus, the landscape images of the films could not produce such an effect of auratic loss.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Central Park', *New German Critique*, no. 34 (1985), p. 41.

if this structure of temporality did not also, and at the same time, involve a projected experience of an actual historical loss. The same history that is projected onto the romance narratives is also refracted across the landscaped mise-en-scene, and the spectacular images that could be perceived as merely touristic are rather imbricated with the social logic of Italian political loss and thus interpellate the spectator not as a tourist but as a subject in mourning.

This effect is perhaps most visible in the final shots of *Mediterraneo* and *Il Postino*, both of which cut or track from a scene of characters in mourning to long shots of the landscape. These shots underline the connection of landscape to the romance narratives, tying the abstract auratic effect of temporality in the landscapes themselves to the specific experience of historical loss expressed by the characters in the preceding sequences. Thus, in *Mediterraneo*, the final scene includes Lo Russo's repudiation of political will, completing the shift from his desire to build a great country to his admission of defeat, and comes directly after the lieutenant's discovery of Vassilissa's death. The camera tracks left from the now old men to reframe on the mountains, where the auratic break is immediately readable in terms of this narrative mourning. *Il Postino* includes an even more explicit binding of affective landscape to mourning work, when Neruda finally hears the dictaphone tape that Mario had made for him before his death. The tape contains Mario's attempt to record the island, to capture in sound that which can only be an image: the sea, the cliffs, the sky. These images are only visible to Neruda and to the spectator in the knowledge of Mario's death, and hence their technological presence (doubled by recording) is tied to the irrevocable pastness of their production.

The ultimate effect of this both/and logic, by which the landscape is coded simultaneously as immediate and as referential, is to form what Benjamin terms a dialectical image. For Benjamin, the dialectical image is crucial to a theorization of history outside of narratives of progress. In *The Arcades Project*, he says

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what it past: rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical. . . images.<sup>26</sup>

26 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 462–3.

Here, history is conceptualized as a political and experiential moment in time, a space in which past and present can be brought into conjunction, to form a dialectic relationship in which a historical constellation can be imagined anew. My claim for these films is that landscape functions as such a dialectical image, forming a critical

reading of the Italian postwar history of 1945 and 1992 by setting up a productive tension between two opposing operations of mise-en-scene

The first element of this structure is precisely the auratic: the force with which the landscape image ruptures representation, and hence produces an affect of pure temporal distance, of materiality and its loss. Conceivable, as I have suggested, as a crossroads of the aura, the indexical and of Kracauer's trees that break belief in a historical narrative, this mode evokes the real insofar as the landscape image offers to stand in for an experiential truth. The affective power of this mode is predicated on its ability to break out of signification, and to produce an emotional effect not from any specific materiality but from its displacement onto abstract space and time. However, at the moment of this representational break, the landscape image also moves in exactly the opposite direction, for this image of temporal loss necessarily recalls that which it has deflected: the social narrative of an actual history and its material losses, the time of 1945 as felt in 1992. And this history connects the landscape mise-en-scene to the films' narratives, where both produce a spectatorial position that repeats the emotionally-charged cathexis of mourning. The 'real' history of the failure of the Italian Left both entails and is entailed by the auratic 'real' of the image, their contradictory formal operations binding a historical narrative and temporal experience into dialectical tension.

If the spectacular landscape promises in its visibility to show the truth of Italy, the corollary of asking what meanings this truth stands in for is to ask why this fetish, this particular kind of image, should be able to carry such signifiatory weight. In other words, what is specific to these landscapes that enables this dialectical structure to hold? To consider this question, it is necessary to return to De Santis and the stake of Italian neorealism in representing a national political space in the 1940s. It would be possible to produce a fairly straightforward historical reading of the importance of landscape in Italian culture in general and neorealism in particular: many of the standard works on Italian cinema cite the influence of novelists such as Verga and Silone on neorealism's focus on rural life.<sup>27</sup> De Santis himself connects the use of landscape to the politics of the wartime Left, claiming that the rural setting of many neorealist films made a crucial space in which to represent the peasants and workers who had formed the first mass resistance to Fascism.<sup>28</sup>

*Mediterraneo*, *Cinema Paradiso* and *Il Postino* contain numerous references to some of the key texts of neorealism: from the opening shots of the bay in *Il Postino*, in which fishing boats are seen at sunrise in a picturesque long-shot, which directly references the landscape of *La Terra Trema*, to more diffuse references such as the job advert in *Il Postino* that recalls *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948), or the sentimentality of *Cinema Paradiso*'s version of

27 See for example Francesco Casetti, 'Le néoréalisme Italien: le cinéma comme reconquête de réel', *CinémaAction* no. 60 (1991) pp. 70–78; Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1984); Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

28 Giuseppe De Santis, 'Italie: ruralité et néoréalisme', *CinémaAction* no. 36 (1986) pp. 60–61.

childhood that again cites De Sica. These references construct a historical logic whereby landscape sets off a metonymic chain, linking the historical narratives of the films both to a cinematic and a political history, and furthermore, to a national-cultural history of landscape to which neorealism itself laid claim. But if this intertextual logic explains why landscape might offer a privileged mise-en-scene of postwar history for Italian cinema, it is not the whole story, for the historical space between the neorealist landscape and its reiteration in the 1990s is also part of the dialectical image, forming another circuit of its both/and bind.

To reference neorealism is to make a certain truth claim for the image, a claim that in the late 1940s was both formal and political. Angela Dalle Vacche describes the project of neorealism as to 'shoot in the present tense',<sup>29</sup> and this attention to the historical moment is definitional of the political power of a film such as Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945). However, by citing this image fifty years after the fact, neorealism has become itself historicized and a gap is opened up so that the image can no longer stand directly for truth, but rather connotes a certain history of truth-telling. Neorealism has been called, 'the repository of partisan hopes for social justice in the postwar Italian state',<sup>30</sup> and as such, it is also a chronicle of the failure of those hopes. For contemporary films to reference its politics is inevitably to take on the difference of this historical perspective. *Cinema Paradiso* includes a scene nearly identical to one in *La Terra Trema*, in which a group of men wait for casual work, but the Communist is stigmatized and fails to get a job. But whereas in the earlier film this injustice could be read as a call to action, in *Cinema Paradiso* the inevitable failure of such action is already known and the historical process located in the past tense. This doubled relationship to political and filmic history is part of the dialectical image, for it is not merely an ironised rejection of the political 'truth' of neorealism. The ideological and cinematic codes of the 1940s are at once still the basis of Italian leftist identity and were as false then as they are now. The films cannot fail to refer to neorealism, yet must cite its impossibility at the same time as its necessity.

In addition to this textual logic, the dialectic within which the landscape image signifies both indexical truth and a metonymic chain of specific historical meanings also involves a geopolitical logic. Just as the Benjaminian structure of abstract temporal loss in the aura must also displace a concrete social loss, so the spatial form of the tree and the branch also implicates a specific content, a geographical place with social and textual legibility. The location of all three films can be broadly defined as the South. *Cinema Paradiso* is quite geographically specific, describing Giancaldo as a village on the southern coast of Sicily, in *Il Postino*, the island is a fictionalized version of Capri, and in *Mediterraneo* the location is not Italy at all.

29 Angela Dalle Vacche, *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes of History in Italian Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 103.

30 Marcus, p. xiv.

but a Greek island, placing the Italian characters further south still. These locations can be read as more references to neorealism, for many key neorealist films are set in the South, including *La Terra Trema*, *Anni Difficili* (Luigi Zampa, 1948) and *In the Name of the Law* (Pietro Germi, 1948), and take as their main theme the poverty and oppression of the southern peasants. But this reference is only part of a complex web of meanings within which the image of the South operates in Italian politics and culture, and through which concepts of a singular national identity are problematized.

Foremost, the South in Italian terms connotes the North/South split, in which the South has historically been posed as a peripheral space within the Italian state. The political, economic and cultural split between the north of Italy and the south did not begin with World War II, but it was in the war years that it developed a structuring influence on national identity and political debate. While the country was partitioned, the South enjoyed a relatively secure period with a prewar style conservative government, while the North endured heavy fighting and formed the stronghold of the partisan movement, a coalition of Communists, Socialists, Liberals and Christian Democrats. This political divide remained after the war, with left-leaning coalitions and the PCI gaining support in the North, and the South becoming the bastion of the DC.

In addition to this party political geography, the postwar years saw a massive divide develop in terms of wealth, as industrialization rapidly changed the North, leaving much of the South rural and impoverished. The subsequent magnification of the differences between the regions means that even in the postwar years, and certainly by the 1990s, any representation of a southern location implies not only a rural landscape but a poor and, from a leftist point of view, politically-distant one. This perceived distance of the South, its peripheral status in postwar Italy, has also conventionally been thought of within a discourse of primitivism: the racist cliché of Northern Italians is 'after Rome, Africa'. And this idea is not limited to folk wisdom, but recurs in historical and political analyses in which the South is considered to be less 'European' than the rest of Italy.

The idea of the South, then, becomes the nub of many problems of Italian national identity, and it is this imbrication of geographical with historical categories that the films' locations in the 'South' play upon. On the one hand, to the extent that the films construct a heritage image of picturesque rural life, they could be read as taking part in this discourse of primitivism, albeit in a contemporary touristic, rather than overtly racist register. Certainly, the signifiers of southernness in the landscape are those of the rural and the premodern, focusing in both *Cinema Paradiso* and *Il Postino* on barren countryside, scrubby hills and villages. The rhetorical distance of this particular kind of rural landscape is emphasized in

*Mediterraneo*, where the location is not Italy but a fantasy South, a Greek island where the signifiers of southernness can be exaggerated, forming a kind of Mediterranean *typage* within which all the characters are enabled to 'find their roots'. This process is made clear in a sequence that begins with a picturesque long-shot of the bay, and then tracks left to Farina sitting beside the lieutenant, who is drawing the landscape. The lieutenant has already forged a connection to the island, both by his drawing and through his claim for a shared ancient Greek heritage. Meanwhile, two soldiers from Northern Italy sit on a hilltop, watching the sun set over the water, in an image that condenses their regional identification with mountain landscape and the picturesque qualities of the fantasmatic South.

However, as with the question of landscape in heritage cinema, what could be misread as touristic spectacle is, in these films, part of the construction of historical loss, where the specificity of the southern locations is tied to the films' nostalgic and melodramatic narratives. Totò's loss of Elena coincides with his rejection of Sicily for the mainland, and his painful return to Ginacaldo at the end of *Cinema Paradiso* is figured primarily as a return to the space of the South. Physical distance collapses onto temporal distance, where Totò's journey to Ginacaldo seems almost like time travel to an older Italy. The modern viaduct by which he arrives hovers above the landscape, leaving the Sicilian hills themselves visually separate from encroaching modernity. In this way, while this 'distant' or exotic South can only be conceptualized as such from the position of the North, the unmarked 'European' part of Italy, that North can only mourn the site of its own historical loss by projecting it onto its primitive other.

There is another double bind in this projection, in which the premodern southern landscape stands, in a geographical and historical slippage, for the nostalgic past of a socialist utopia *manqué*. For if the exotic primitivism of the South allows it to stand for a space of historical desire, its regional history forces a split on exactly those terms. While the South provides a necessary space for the fantasy of political potential, it simultaneously offers a reminder of how and why the historical moment of 1945 went awry for the Left. The South was never a space of leftist activism and, as is depicted in *Il Postino* and *Cinema Paradiso*, it offered little promise for Communists in the postwar years. Thus, the southern locations of the films reiterate the structure of the dialectical image, its pristine beauty connoting at once the time before the political changes of the DC years and the inevitability of those changes. Nostalgia can only be visualized at a remove, but it is displaced onto the precise place that historically refused radical political change.

This geographical logic also contains a 1990s perspective. While the North-South divide is certainly an ongoing political and cultural issue during the intervening years, it became politically central once

more in the wake of the *mani pulite* scandals. Northern resentment at supporting the economically weaker regions was given an explicit voice with the rise of the Northern League, a new political party that sought to speak for a submerged regionalism, and whose appeal was implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, racist. So it is at the moment at which the films are looking back to the inception of the modern North–South dynamic that this relation again contributes to Italy’s national crisis. Just as the North–South split took on increased weight at the beginning of the Cold War, so its ideological power was renewed in the wake of the Cold War’s end. In order to reimagine the nation, it would be pressing to rethink the history of the split. And while in 1945 the South constituted a problem for the Left, by the 1990s it offered a contrast to the post-Cold War rightward swing of the urban voters who embraced Berlusconi’s free-market rhetoric and the Northern League’s racism. It is for this reason, perhaps, that it is the South, and not the North, which becomes the desirable object of a leftist nostalgic gaze in the 1990s.

For Benjamin, the dialectical image enables a radicalized relationship to history, in which the present as much as the past can be reimagined, re-experienced and critiqued. In Convolute N of *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin discusses history and the dialectic, and claims, ‘The materialist presentation of history leads the past to place the present in a critical condition’,<sup>31</sup> and in Convolute K he considers the idea of awakening as, ‘An attempt to become aware of the dialectical . . . turn of remembrance’.<sup>32</sup> What remembrance enables in these films is a relationship to the past that is both critical and emotional, distanced and immediate, and indeed cannot be one without invoking the other. Furthermore, the relationship to history must come from a particular point in the present, for both the distance of the past and the closeness of the present are necessary components of remembrance. At the moment preceding the *mani pulite* scandals, Italian political culture was indeed in a critical condition, and by enabling a re-experiencing of the loss of leftist hopes in the 1940s, these films return to the stakes of the Italian Republic at the moment when it finally became possible to imagine its end.

31 Walter Benjamin. Konvolut N [Theoretics of knowledge: theory of progress], trans. Leigh Hafrey and Richard Sieburth. *The Philosophical Forum* vol. 15 nos. 1–2 (1983–4) p. 18.

32 Benjamin. *The Arcades Project* p. 388.

## Screen dossier: European actors in Hollywood

### Introduction

Film studies has recently seen a growth of interest in the role of exiles and emigres. Scholars with varying frames of reference have begun to assess questions of adaptation, integration and hybridity within specific film cultures with the shared aim of reworking received definitions of national cinema.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Elsaesser has even recently argued with typical polemical force that Hollywood's actual fictions 'of displacement, transport and virtual realities might in fact stem from the contradictory triangulations of migration, national or ethnic stereotyping and exile'.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the significant contribution made by large numbers of European actors to Hollywood, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to this particular phenomenon from a scholarly perspective. This *Screen* dossier begins to address this imbalance by considering a number of historical, textual and theoretical questions raised by the interrelationship between stardom and national identity. By focusing on performers, rather than directors and technicians, it aims to develop a new agenda for an understanding of the complex history of exile or emigration in European film.

In the first paper of the dossier, Dana Polan proposes a range of methodological issues regarding the complex processes of transformation and production involving the use of European actors in Hollywood. He argues persuasively that whilst one should always be aware of the historical specificities of an individual actor's encounter with the industry, it is also helpful to remember a broader set of structural relations regarding the principles of Hollywood as a business enterprise. Polan's point here is that we 'need to get away from rigid binary oppositions that always pit a restrictive Hollywood

1 To give just two recent examples see Hamid Naficy *An Accented Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Dudley Andrew 'Film noir, death and double cross over the Atlantic' *Iris* no. 21 (Spring 1996) pp. 21–30.

2 Thomas Elsaesser 'Ethnicity, authenticity, and exile: a counterfeit trade? German filmmakers and Hollywood' in Hamid Naficy (ed.) *Home/Exile/Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 1999) pp. 97–124.

administration against a creativity of cultural workers, and understand how individual cases negotiated the limitations but also the benefits of the mode of production'

Both my own and Geneviève Sellier's subsequent papers consider these matters in relation to a number of French emigre actors who worked in the Hollywood industry during the studio system era. In my essay on the comparative success and failure of the American screen careers of Charles Boyer and Annabella, I consider a range of economic, production and critical contexts in which to place the specificities of their practice as actors. My analysis revolves around the crucial question of the actor's voice, not just in the literal sense of the embodiment of a nationally specific register of feeling and meaning, but also as a means of articulating a commercially successful strategy of 'fitting in' with the concerns of the industry. Questions of both gender and genre are significant here.

Sellier develops this point, arguing in her essay that there was a real lack of equivalence between the way French genre cinema used female stars and how US cinema expected to use female performers regardless of their nationality. The US studios wanted to recruit female stars to Hollywood on the basis of what they did in Europe, but then found that without the necessary cultural contexts, these onscreen identities necessarily became weakened. Stars like Micheline Presle, Danielle Darrieux and Michèle Morgan, for example, were thus defeated on two fronts: they were expected to be the same as before, and they were also not given enough opportunities to be different. Sellier's analysis of French written discourses concerning the US careers of these stars points to a historically specific moment when these oppositions also highlighted the construction of French cultural identity *vis à vis* the USA.

Clearly, as I suggest in the conclusion of my case-study, the history of the use of European actors in Hollywood is both equivocal and problematic in a way that is perhaps more telling than the parallel chronologies involving Hollywood's strategy of overseas recruitment of directors and technicians. In this sense, the dossier serves to raise a complex set of questions regarding cultural expectation, financial management and onscreen performance. In short, it proposes a new direction for the discussion of stardom within film studies.

#### **Alastair Phillips – dossier editor**

This project and the forthcoming book – Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau (eds) *Journeys of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood* – stem from a European and American-wide research initiative concerned with the participation of European film personnel in American cinema. This is being coordinated from the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. Geneviève Sellier's and Alastair Phillips's papers were due to be presented at a conference at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in September 2001. This was unfortunately cancelled in the immediate aftermath of the events in the USA on 11 September.

## Further Reading

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# Methodological reflections on the study of the emigre actor

DANA POLAN

*The actor's relation to the public is that of an artist, but in relation to his employer, he is a productive labourer*

Karl Marx

The study of the emigre actor connects logically and predictably to two areas of inquiry that have been important to film studies as a discipline: star studies and studies of emigre culture (an area that goes beyond film to spill over into intellectual history). But less common, although no less logically linked to film studies' critical concerns, is the way in which studying the emigre actor might also contribute to another area of endeavour, whose connections to the topic might at first seem surprising. I am thinking of the general interest in diasporic culture, that attention to the movement of persons out of and into complicated national contexts that has become so important to the agenda of critical study in recent years. Certainly, much of the history of the emigre actor can be understood in light of issues of diaspora, as in large part it is a history of actors displaced from their origins, searching either for a way to forge a new identity or to reinvigorate the best elements of a past identity in a new social context. For instance, while many emigres were recruited into the Hollywood system or came because of their own desire to work with a system of vast resources and professionalism, it is also clearly the case that many came because of forms of exile.<sup>1</sup> No doubt it is in the very nature of star studies and emigre studies, as they have traditionally been practised, to discourage us from thinking of actors in relation to political issues of exile, displacement, cultural

<sup>1</sup> For a useful introduction to the range of diasporic identities and their theorization in media studies see John Sinclair and Stuart Cunningham: 'Go with the flow: diasporas and the media', *Television and New Media* vol. 1 no. 1 (2000) pp. 11–31.

clash and/or assimilation. On the one hand the study of the star, even when it is inflected by a cultural studies concern to examine the variability of meanings in the construction of the star image, frequently concentrates on individual stars, seeing them as isolated cases with their own specificity rather than representatives of larger social groups. The obvious extreme of such a tendency is the hagiographic biographies that accompany the history of Hollywood stars. On the other hand, but in parallel fashion, the study of the emigre has often downplayed the politics of emigration by means of a veritable high-art bias in which the focus is the heroic effort of lone individuals to find possibilities of expressiveness in a new culture that often appears unresponsive to them (hence the many anecdotes about the incomprehension of Hollywood producers faced with the foreigners they had brought into the system and did not really know how to use).<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, both star studies and emigre studies seem here to be seduced by the aura of the individual, by a mythology of creativity as an activity in opposition to politics, rather than as one of the ways politics is worked out in everyday practice. For both discourses, the actor or the emigre represents a force of personal will fighting for aesthetic expression in the face of the incomprehension of a crass business world. (Emigre discourse will in some cases even go beyond the castigation of particular industries such as film to assail the whole culture as decadent, as in Adorno's response to US mass culture.)<sup>3</sup> Certainly, we would want to respect, and historicize in all their detail, the specificity of individual acts of emigration and the biographical trajectories of individual stars, but we also need to be attentive to structural regularities and logics in the way that emigre actors have been constituted into social formations and moved to negotiate the Hollywood system throughout its history.

In this essay, I want to examine some of the ways we might begin to construct a politics of the emigre actor. My goal is less to provide answers than to indicate the range of directions in which research could proceed. In particular, borrowing from recent debate and dialogue between cultural studies and political economy, I would suggest that we might analyze emigre actors as things made by a mode of production, and thereby analyze them according to three levels in the social circulation of such things: first, the activity of production (the province of political economy), second, the structure of the produced thing itself (the province, in the case of actors, of image-analysis, iconographic analysis, textual analysis, semiological commutation tests, and so on), third, the reception/consumption of the produced thing. For reasons of brevity, I will concentrate on the dimension of political economy in the production of the actor. Of course, the three levels ultimately reveal themselves to be inextricable from one another. For instance, in the case of actor studies, it is obvious that a political economy can set limits on

2 For a representative example see Otto Friedrich's *City of Nets: a Portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) which to a great degree endorses a narrative of individual cultured Europeans trying to negotiate the ostensibly crass system of the Hollywood mode of production.

3 See among other writings, *Minima Moralia* with its apt subtitle and written in the USA. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 1974). Another key statement of Adorno's on exile in America is *Aldous Huxley and America* in *Prisms* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981) pp. 95–117.

access to, and form of, representation in ways that would have consequences both for the nature of the actor's image and for the meanings viewers can take away from the films in which he/she appears. To take just one example, the fact that the Warner Bros powers-that-be consign a major French actor such as the refugee Marcel Dalio to a relatively minor role in a film like *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) means that within the Hollywood mode of production, his signification is quantitatively limited (he is only on screen in a few short scenes) with consequences for the impact he can (or cannot) have on spectators.

For another instance of how political economy, text and consumption intermingle, we can study how the semiological commutation test, in which one sets out to demarcate a minimally meaningful signifier by seeing what changes to it bring about a new signified, has been used in star studies to examine just what textual meanings this or that star particularly embody. Imagining different stars in a role, one uses the commutation test to try to pinpoint how the meanings of a role become intertwined with the identity of this or that actor. But it is clear that the presence, and therefore meaning and effect, of various actors in a role is dependent on a variety of production decisions (the stories are legion about classic films whose original casting was quite different from that which reached the screen. for example, *Casablanca* with Ann Sheridan and Ronald Reagan). We need not only to imagine how things might have been otherwise with another actor, but also to determine how things became the way they are, how specific industry decisions finalized the association of actor and role. Likewise, it would seem that the commutation test necessitates the role of an adjudicator, someone who is literate in the system of signification and can in fact note that signification has changed. A viewer has to be called upon to declare that meaningful change has occurred. Significant difference is actualized in the moment of consumption. In other words, where classic semiology tends to imagine the commutation test as a purely formal exercise in which changes in the signifier bring about changes in signification, cultural studies has made it increasingly apparent that signification is as much a matter of reception as of formal play. A change in an actor is significant only to the extent that the viewer takes it as significant, and here the formal nature of the text intertwines with all the cultural baggage that the spectator brings to the act of viewing: social stereotypes, ideology, background knowledge, and so on.

Yet to concentrate on political economy as producing the actor might seem to beg a question that especially haunts popular writing on stars: is the actor first of all not a production, but a person, a consciousness and body that fight for self-identity? Is the integrity of the actor reducible to the status of mere commodity in a system of production? It seems clear, in fact, that the identity of someone as

actor is different from the person behind the actor: to be or become an actor is to take up a certain identity, one that is rarely not social, rarely not subject to systemic pressures coming from the mode of production. One might imagine an emigre actor acting in ways that seem to well up from personal talent, will and desire. For example, did Los Angeles theatrical productions with emigre actors give them more self-expression than their movie appearances? Were there private contexts in which an actor could let it all out, even if only in front of the mirror in the actor's abode and for a private audience of the self or at dinner parties of like-minded friends? But, outside rare moments and private occasions where actors might get to do their thing, to offer oneself to the Hollywood machinery was to submit to a process of transformation, of production. (And of course, we also need to examine all the ways in which private life is also a social production, albeit one different perhaps from the Hollywood process of production.) If we wish to admit biography into the study of the actor, it would at the very least need to be that sort of existential Marxist biography envisioned by Jean-Paul Sartre in which the biographical subject is treated as a 'singular universal, possessing an irreducible personal existence but in its very irreducibility still summing up social options of the historical moment'. For Sartre, the individual has two specificities: that of his/her personal biography but also that of the ways that biography is lived out socially. The singular individual has necessarily to be inscribed, as a universal inevitability, into history.<sup>4</sup>

4 Jean-Paul Sartre *L'Idiot de la famille* tome 1 *Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1857* (Paris: Editions Gallimard 1971)

The political economy of production involves issues of power: what are the relations of production, who has access to management, how does the labourer work towards political representation? It also touches on issues of welfare: to what extent is the well-being of the labourer insured within the mode of production? In the case of actors, there are a number of issues of this sort that we could study. What access, if any, did actors have to ownership of the means of their own production? We might look, as some scholars have done, at contractual battles between actors and head office. Likewise, to what extent was the actor's political representation and cultural representation limited by pre-determined decisions and practices of the production system? It would be interesting in the study of individual actors, for instance, to look at studio archives and see if there are documents (memos, front-office directives, and so on) that discuss particular actors before filming begins and in which the nature of their filmic appearance is already being discussed and established. Evelyn Waugh's sardonic motif in his Hollywood novel *The Loved One* of an actress who is endlessly being altered (even physically) according to studio executive directives, as audience tastes change from, say, Spanish spitfires to Irish colleens, is perhaps not so fanciful a dramatization of standard Hollywood practices. One can easily imagine there are documents

that record how the wishes of the Hollywood system for a particular look to this or that actor became inscribed directly onto the actor's body

An additional area of research on the question of power might involve the study of labour activism by actors: what were the means by which emigre actors could participate, for instance, in unionization and guild activity? And if the hierarchized nature of the Hollywood mode of production leads us logically to examine manager-actor relations, we also need to refer back to my opening comments on diaspora and research the relations of actors to other people, including their exile compatriots. elsewhere in the studio hierarchy: what, for instance, were the relations of emigre actors to technicians from their country or to the vast infrastructural array of craft workers and anonymous support staff? Were there emigre nationalist organizations or cultural centres in Los Angeles and what participation did the emigre actors have in them? To take just one example of the possible activist relations of actors to the politics of production, in his majestic study *The Cultural Front*, historian Michael Denning chronicles how the Mexican-American actress Rita Hayworth was a leftist who participated quite directly in Latino struggle (for example, she was a prime protestor in the infamous Sleepy Lagoon case in which a number of Los Angeles Latinos were arrested for murder). For Denning, it was Hayworth's ethnic ties as well as her political sympathies that led her to take up the case, even as the studio system tried to de-ethnicize her as a pure white beauty with no political commitments.<sup>5</sup> And if we are to look at the activities of actors outside their work for the studios, we also should examine the politics of their leisure time. Were there particular forms of leisure for different emigre communities? (For example, in *The Loved One*, Waugh depicts the British exile community in Hollywood as desperately trying to continue the same lifestyle that it had enjoyed in Britain.) To what extent was such leisure a release from the demands of production or, in contrast, an ideological apparatus by which workers were refreshed in their spare time in order to come back all the more energetically to the world of work? Studies of Hollywood have long emphasized the extreme devotion there to fun and play (the parties, the nightclubs, the swank eateries), but rarely has the potential role of such amusement in the political economy of production been examined. There is interesting work to be done on the politics of everyday life in Hollywood and on the ways leisure and labour interact.

Additionally, we need to study not only the mode of production dominant at one time, but its relation to other modes, both those existing elsewhere in the same historical moment and those preceding and following it. On the one hand, how did Hollywood production of the actor compare to that in other modes of production? We could study, for instance, differences in pre-production (for example, how

5 Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: the Labouring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996) pp. 19, 399 and passim.

much rehearsal time is allowed?), in production (what happened on the set?), in post-production (for example, what impact did different technologies of sound post-synchronization have on actor styles and their ability to work well within Hollywood?) We might also want to distinguish various modes of production within the Hollywood mode for example, what was it like to act in for a B-studio and what transpired on the set in the shooting of multiple-language-versions of films? On the other hand, we need to look the changing history of the Hollywood mode of production and examine the varying effects that has on the production and power of emigre actors. Thus, to take just one example, the new multinational mode of Hollywood production – where, more than ever, foreign distribution of US films is key to their success, where even the financing of US films comes increasingly from foreign sources – implies a new role for the foreign actor. It has become an important marketing strategy to use international actors in film (even though they may not always be playing characters from their own actual country of origin). As *Variety* editor Peter Bart puts it, in an interview with the *New York Times* about the impact that the sale of Universal to the French company Vivendi might have

When Sony bought Columbia Pictures, there was all kinds of talk in the American media about, oh, we're selling our culture to foreigners. The interesting thing is that, this time, there's none of that. That's because times have changed. Most people aren't aware of it, but there's been so much in the way of European money flowing into Hollywood in recent years to help finance American movies and it's beginning to affect the kinds of movies that are being made and the way they're cast. They're putting people into movies who are known in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Rick Lyman. No trace of anti-Hollywood bias in French purchase of Universal. *New York Times* 20 June 2000 p. C12

Production creates not only things and opportunities for power but also value (for example, use-values, exchange-values, symbolic value). Here, too, there are research questions to be addressed. For instance, what value could actors gain for themselves from entrance into the Hollywood system? To what extent is the actor a source of surplus-value not just for owners and management but for his/her own self? In addition to the usual values actors could take from the Hollywood system, such as economic well-being, security and salvation from dangerous political situations at home, there were undoubtedly cases in which actors grew in their techniques from work in the Hollywood system. The new attention in film studies to Hollywood as the codified professional elaboration, refinement and perfection of a particular mode of production, has led to a revision in our understanding of Hollywood's value where it had been traditional to think of Hollywood as a negative influence on creativity, the new study of Hollywood understands it as a site of production that could *enable* as much as *disable*. What were the

7 Note for instance how recent scholarship has begun to take a more positive view of the Hollywood producer now envisioned as a veritable enabling force for talent. For a representative example, see George Cuslen *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). Perhaps the work that most announces this new affirmative direction is Tom Schatz's revealingly titled *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1996) in which the system itself is seen to spark creative potential.

positive virtues of the Hollywood system for emigres and their craft? We need to get away from rigid binary oppositions that always pit a restrictive Hollywood administration against a creativity of cultural workers, and understand how individual cases negotiated the limitations, but also the benefits, of the mode of production.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, though, we need also to research the value that actors could have for owners, managers and investors. For example, it is obvious that some emigre actors would be attractive simply because the conditions of their emigration – such as the flight from Fascism – might allow them to be bought and brought in cheaply. At the very least, the emigre actor might be part of an available but disposable surplus labour force (this seems, for instance, to be the situation of Dario). Conversely, it is certainly the case that some actors establish value not by their disposability – their resemblance to other products (in this case, other anonymous actors) that can replace them – but by their indispensability, the offer of a value that is differential. Not all foreign actors become part of an anonymous mass in which they can be moulded indifferently into any role. Certain actors are produced in ways which give them a distinction in the production process and allow them to be marketed and sold in special ways. In the case of emigre actors, for instance, we could study how differing national origins give actors varying degrees of cultural capital in the Hollywood hierarchy. Not all countries have the same cultural connotations, and this gave differential value to various emigre actors. The British or French actor, for instance, frequently offers an image of old-world sophistication and elegance, that creates prestige and that is not available to many other European identities. Thus, in World War II, one Hollywood use of British actors was to establish the image of a cultural value that should be fought for and maintained at all costs – for example, *Goodbye Mr Chips* (Sam Wood, 1939) with its image of English high tradition and donnish wisdom. At the same time, British difference and superiority can also shore up a valued image of US innocence, down-to-earth pragmatism, and an admirable lack of pretension. In fact, numerous World War II Hollywood films about England, and with English actors, portray the country as a repository of worthy high values, but also suggest that there is here the potential for an elitism or snobbery that needs to be tempered by a worldly purity not unlike US populism (thus, Mr Chips has to learn to fall in love with a down-to-earth woman, and the middle-class Mrs Miniver has to fight in order to enter her roses into fair competition with those of an aristocrat).

As we know, value in commodities comes not only from use and exchange but also from salesmanship and marketing, and a political economy of the actor would want to pay attention to the ways the actor is packaged, promoted and put onto the market. How did fan magazines talk about foreign actors? Does foreignness get emphasized as a saleable value in promotion booklets or in

advertising campaigns and posters? Studio archives often offer much information on promotion and publicity, and it would be worth studying how specific emigre actors were marketed: whether, for instance, they were presented as exotic others or framed in ways that emphasized their commonness with their US *confrères*. Here, again, Denning's work on Rita Hayworth reveals a conflict between her own ethnic and political commitments and a marketing of her created by Hollywood (and internalized by so many spectators who remember her only as a white bombshell in *Gilda* [Charles Vidor, 1946]). With marketing, we begin to touch upon the concern of cultural studies with the consumer and his/her relative degree of freedom in relation to the system of commodities. There is much to be done in research on audience response to emigre actors: the role of test marketing, the power of fandom, expressions (in reviews, letters, everyday conversation) to the value or not granted to various actors (and whether there is any national regularity to the acceptability of various stars).

There are numerous areas to be studied in terms of the distinction through production and marketing that accrues to the diverse national identities of emigre actors. For example, if the British or French actor can indicate positive differential values, we could also study the history of German actors and the values they construct: the bumbling fuddy-duddies of 1930s film (for example, S. Z. Sakall in many comedies), the Nazi officer who has perverted European wisdom, the Nazi footsoldier who is a fool at his job (for instance, the guard in *Stalag 17* [Billy Wilder, 1953], predecessor of *Hogan's Heroes*' Schultz). And between the anonymous actor whose value comes from a surplus labour force that allows him/her to come cheaply and to be expendable and the actor who gains value because he/she expresses the meanings of a European culture, there is a mixed form: the actor who signifies European-ness but in a way that allows him/her to play Europeans from any number of countries. Thus, Hollywood often blurred Eastern Europe countries as well as Scandinavian countries and Austro-Germanic countries, and assumed that an actor from a particular region could take on any number of national identities of that region. And in light of Peter Bart's comments above on the rise of an intercontinental type of European actor, we might look at the ways in which certain actors can come to suggest a mobility of national identities. Take, for instance, the case of French actor Jean Reno, who has become a veritable force in the elaboration of a multinational entertainment cinema. In several films, Reno plays a figure who travels between cultures and comes to symbolize the openness of borders and a fluidity of national identities in a postnational moment. In *Le Grand bleu* (Luc Besson, 1988), he is seemingly French but named Enzo (an Italian name). In *Léon* (Luc Besson, 1994), he has a French name but lives in America and has only the Italian mafia as his surrogate family. In *Godzilla* (Roland

Emmerich, 1998), he is a Frenchman who learns to reject his country's nuclear test policy and become a virtual American when he infiltrates the US military by wearing its uniform, chewing gum, and talking with an accent based on the viewing of Elvis Presley movies. In *The Visitors* (Jean-Marie Poiré, 1993), he is a French knight who has to negotiate the strangeness of US mass culture. At virtually the same moment that France fights a battle with GATT to achieve recognition of its 'cultural exception', actors like Reno, Gérard Depardieu, Sophie Marceau, and Juliette Binoche play in films where their Frenchness is denied or treated as a mere form of local colour (as in *Chocolat* (Lasse Hallström, 2000) in which Binoche plays a French woman but, like the rest of the cast, speaks English exclusively).

Such a case brings us back to political issues of movement through and across national contexts. The question of diaspora, for instance, connects with concerns in today's study of culture to examine the relations of globalism and nationalism, and the nature of identity within the flux of contemporary state formations. How, for example, does the shaping and reshaping of actors' images reflect back on the endurance of nationalist models or anticipate instead new hybrid identities in an age of multinationalism? On the one hand, Hollywood works according to an assimilationist model in which emigres are supposed to come to the US and as workers act like Americans, on the other hand, the Hollywood system is dependent on having them perform 'foreignness' and in ways that can affirm national stereotypes even as individual national identities get blurred. Whereas diasporic studies today emphasize the flux of identity, the Hollywood studio system has historically been unable to represent complex hybrid status, often relying instead on stereotypes of Americanness and foreignness.

There are in fact many ways in which we can move the study of stars beyond anecdote, personal biography and even hagiography, and I have tried in this short essay to suggest some of the ways we might begin to approach this rich area of research and critical inquiry. We need, I argue, to move away from a presentation of the emigre actor in exclusive terms of personal biography to a critical understanding in which the actor is seen simultaneously as an activity and object of production and as a practice of consumption.

# Changing bodies/changing voices: success and failure in Hollywood in the early sound era

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS

In an interview with the US journalist Gladys Hall, Annabella (1909–96), one of France's most successful female film stars of the 1930s, vividly articulated her passion for cultural transformation 'I always wanted to change, change all the time, never to stay in one place for so long', she said 'Very early on I decided that only in the cinema could I have this changing life, these changing bodies In the cinema, I could shed the bodies, like dresses, one after the other'<sup>1</sup> As with her French compatriot Charles Boyer (1899–1978), Annabella's fascination with transition led her to Hollywood to pursue a new kind of acting role This performance meant a complex and suggestive conflation of the notion of acting in relation to a fictional onscreen identity with that of acting in relation to an extratextual persona, marked as much by where it had come from as by what it was in the process of becoming This essay will explore the economic and aesthetic tensions inherent in the various journeys that Boyer and Annabella made as actors to the USA in the early sound era By choosing two different case studies, and ones with radically varying degrees of commercial success, I will shed light on some of the critical issues which must inform a historical understanding of the phenomenon of European actors' emigration to Hollywood during the key transitional years in which all actors' bodies changed onscreen to become performing bodies with speaking voices

<sup>1</sup> *Motion Picture* 13 November 1937

## Journeys and trajectories

- 2 Annabella interview in Christian Gilles (ed.), *Le Cinéma des années trente par ceux qui l'ont fait*, Volume I (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2000), p. 28

- 3 See Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood 1918-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), pp. 163-4

- 4 See Alain Servet, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood la France et les Français dans le cinéma américain de 1929 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions Henri Veyrier, 1987)

'It was the golden age of Hollywood and we lived as if in a dream. At one reception hosted by Warners, there were several gigantic dining rooms with walls covered in gardenias and these carpets of the most immaculate whiteness sprinkled with brightly coloured orchids.'<sup>2</sup> Annabella's recollections vividly capture the perceived splendour of difference encountered by many of the European actors who arrived in Los Angeles during the early 1930s. As Ruth Vasey has argued, these performers had been recruited for a dual purpose. Their role was to create exotic aural and visual appeal for domestic North American filmgoers but, equally importantly, they were also hired as part of a global industrial strategy to develop international audiences in the new economy of sound cinema.<sup>3</sup> Their journeys had often been long and symbolic. In the case of notable French performers such as Boyer, who left St Lazare train station in Paris in a haze of national publicity, they sailed from the port of Le Havre in liners such as the patriotically named *Ile de France*, the *Europa* or the *Paris*. During this six-day transatlantic crossing, the performers were feted in luxury and largely protected from the poorer classes of exiles and emigrants on the lower decks. After completing the necessary papers on arrival in New York, they then boarded trains such as the 'The Chief' and travelled for three days and four nights across the country before arriving on the West Coast.<sup>4</sup> Despite loaded expectations, however, success was not always instantaneous.



Boyer leaving Paris for the USA in the 1930s.

Boyer, perhaps France's most successful emigre star next to his adopted friend Maurice Chevalier, actually made this extended journey several times before finally settling in the USA. Boyer originally had no intention of pursuing a solely film-based career. His first journey as an actor had been to move from the provinces to Paris in the 1920s, and in the early years of his professional stage development, following training at the Sorbonne and the Conservatoire, he worked hard to develop a reputation as a serious and adept performer in both the classical repertoire and contemporary boulevard productions such as Francis Carco's *Paname*.<sup>5</sup> By the turn of the decade, he could count amongst his circle of professional friends such people as the actress François Rosay and her husband, the film director Jacques Feyder. It was due to Boyer's association with Rosay and Feyder, both now being lured to the USA, and the growing professional esteem in which his mellow and romantic voice was held, that he was initially recruited to Hollywood by MGM's Paul Bern in the spring of 1929. The studio wanted him to appear opposite Greta Garbo in what was to be a multi-language version (MLV) of *The Kiss* (Jacques Feyder, MGM, 1929).<sup>6</sup> The project, however, was never realized as a sound film and Boyer was hired instead to act in the MLV *Le Procès de Mary Dugan* (Marcel de Sano, MGM, 1929).<sup>7</sup> Not receiving any further firm offers of work, he eventually decided to return to Europe where he signed a film

5 For further biographical information, see Larry Swindell *Charles Boyer: the Reluctant Lover* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983). Guy Chassagnard, *Charles Boyer: Acteur* (Figeac: Segnat Editions, 1999).

6 Other associates of Charles Boyer in the transient French acting community in Hollywood at the time included Marcel André, André Berly, André Burgère, Maurice Chevalier, Marcel Dalio, Huguette Duflos, Mona Goya, André Luquet and Arlette Marchal.

7 The very successful English language version, *The Trial of Mary Dugan* (MGM, 1929), starring Norma Shearer, had been shot several months previously. On the phenomenon of the MLV, see GINETTE VINCEDEAU, 'Hollywood babel: the coming of sound and the multiple-language version', in Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (eds), *Film Europe and Film America* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1999), pp. 207–24; NATASHA DURNICHOVA, 'Translating America: the Hollywood multilinguals 1929–1933', in Rick Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory Sound Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 138–53. On the specific question of Hollywood's relationship with France at this time, see for instance, Martine Danan, 'Hollywood's hegemonic strategies: overcoming French nationalism with the advent of sound', in Higson and Maltby (eds), *Film Europe*, pp. 275–48.

**Boyer and his wife on board a liner bound for New York in the 1930s.**



- 8 Boyer had previously shot the MLV *Barcarolle d'amour* (Henry Rousell P.J. de Venloo, 1929) co-starring Annabella in Germany. His UFA MLV films were *Tumultes* (Robert Siodmak, 1931), *Il ne répond pas* (Karl Hartl, 1932) and *Moi et l'impératrice* (Paul Martin, 1932). He also appeared in *Heart Song* (Friedrich Hollander) the English-language version of the latter.
- 9 The English-language version *The Big House* (George W. Hill, MGM, 1930) was a major success in the USA and perhaps therefore Boyer's role attracted a lot of favourable press coverage when the French-language version of the film was released in his home country. Paul Fjøs/Pal Fjøs also shot the film in Spanish and German.
- 10 Chassagnard, *Charles Boyer Acteur*, p. 44.

11 See Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 104.

12 For more on Boyer and *Liliom*, see Alastair Phillips, 'Fritz Lang's *Liliom*: a fateful divide in Douglas Pye (ed.), *Fritz Lang* (Cameron and Hollis, forthcoming).

13 André Berley, Pierre Brasseur, Conchita Montenegro and Marcel Vallée also starred in the French film.

contract to appear in MLVs with the UFA studios in Berlin.<sup>8</sup> Boyer was asked a second time to Los Angeles in December 1930 to appear in another MLV, *Révolte dans la prison* (Paul Féjos, MGM, 1930),<sup>9</sup> and he was subsequently offered his first English speaking role in *The Magnificent Lie* (Berthold Viertel, Paramount, 1931). He recalled leaving the mists of a damp Parisian winter that year and feeling as if he had entered 'a bath of light. Living for months in the theatre playing tormented roles in an anguished atmosphere, I suddenly seemed to have been taken to a marvellous country in which there was only youth, freshness and enthusiasm'.<sup>10</sup> In an indication of Boyer's still lowly status within the Hollywood hierarchy, however, his voice was not actually used for dubbing purposes when the film was released within French-language territories. The actor left the USA in fury, but was tempted back again a year later by his friend Claudette Colbert to play opposite her in *The Man From Yesterday* (Berthold Viertel, Paramount, 1932). As Matthew Bernstein has pointed out, Boyer's role this time was significantly tailored to suit his language ability. In a sign of Paramount's commitment to Boyer's potential attraction as a foreigner, the character was deliberately made to appear multilingual, and his accent was even explicitly referred to in the script as being 'thick as mud'.<sup>11</sup>

Boyer's fourth visit to Hollywood came in 1934 after the relative international success of his performance in Fritz Lang's only French film, *Liliom* (Fritz Lang, Fox Europa, 1934).<sup>12</sup> The actor starred in both the English and French versions of Erik Charell's European-based gypsy musical *Caravan* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1934) which was an extravagant and costly attempt by Fox to emulate recent European musical successes such as *Le Congrès s'amuse* (Erik Charell, UFA, 1931). Annabella was his co-star in the French-language version.<sup>13</sup> The film failed dismally at the box office and it was not really until the actor's subsequent journey across the Atlantic that his English-speaking career began to take off, with his appearance as the principled but romantically inclined doctor in *Private Worlds* (Gregory La Cava, Paramount, 1935). This was the feature which established his commercially successful profile with US and international audiences as 'the French lover', and it introduced that key mixture of emotion, romance, Frenchness and authenticity that came to define his star persona in many of his subsequent Hollywood roles.

Annabella's relationship with Hollywood was equally complex, although rather more predicated on opportunity and plain desire. The daughter of the publisher of the aptly named *Le Journal des Voyages*, she derived her name from a piece of verse by the US writer Edgar Allan Poe. Unlike Boyer, she had no serious background in the Parisian theatre, instead, she flowered as one of France's leading screen actresses of the early sound era, appearing in

14 Co-starring Charles Boyer

15 Annabella also appeared in the following MLVs *La Barcarolle d'amour* (Carl Froelich 1929) shot in Germany *Son Altesse d'amour* (Robert Peguy 1931) shot in Germany *Autour d'une enquête* (Henri Chomette 1931) shot in Germany, *Marie légende hongroise* and *Tavaszi zapor* (Paul Fejos/Pál Fejos 1932) shot in Hungary *Gardez le sourire* and *Sonnenstrahl* (Paul Fejos/Pál Fejos 1933) shot in Austria *Variétés* and *Variété* (Nicolas Farkas 1935) shot in Germany

16 She later married him after divorcing her former co-star the French actor Jean Murat. A number of other French actors played secondary roles in the film including Jean de Briac, Marcelle Corday, Jacques Lory, Fred Malatesta, Odette Myrtil and Jacques Vaneire.

17 Tino Balio *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise 1930–1939* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), p. 144.

such films as René Clair's *Le Million* (Films Sonors Tobis, 1931) and *Quatorze juillet* (Films Sonors Tobis, 1932); *La Bataille* (Nicolas Farkas, Gaumont/Liano Film, 1933).<sup>14</sup> and the award-winning *Veille d'armes* (Marcel L'Herbier, Impérial Film, 1934). Her attractive and photogenic face registered both an exterior shyness and a certain inner spirit of determination and quick-wittedness, and this winning combination for critics and audiences led to commercially successful leading roles in MLV productions in both Germany and Hungary.<sup>15</sup> After the failure of her appearance in the aforementioned *Caravane*, and because of the fact that she could at this stage speak no English, Annabella returned immediately by plane to Europe and was not called to Hollywood again until 1937. The internationalization of her career gathered pace in the intervening years, however, and she appeared in three American–British productions shot in England, including the first European Technicolor feature *Wings of the Morning* (Harold D. Schuster, Twentieth Century Fox/New World Pictures Limited, 1937). It was her crucial contact with Fox's European-based producer Robert Kane that led to a second contract with the US studio. Having now acquired some rudimentary English language, she started work on *The Baroness and the Butler* (Walter Lang, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938), but it was during the shooting of her second film, *Suez* (Allan Dwan, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938) that she came to the attention of the US public for her adulterous affair with co-star Tyrone Power.<sup>16</sup> The fictionalized account of Ferdinand de Lesseps's construction of the Suez Canal did not do well at the box office and after her next film, *Bridal Suite* (William Thiele, MGM, 1939), Annabella did not act in Hollywood again until 1943.

### French tongues in an American context

Why was it, then, that one French star succeeded and another failed when their respective bodies changed location? We may turn to a range of economic, production and critical contexts for further clarification of the reason why Boyer's and Annabella's emigre acting careers varied so much in terms of their outcome.

Tino Balio has demonstrated that by the end of the 1930s the star system in Hollywood had become 'the prime means of stabilising the motion-picture business'.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the commercial potential of an individual performer was a leading factor in the vertically integrated management of the industry: it influenced both the financing of a project and its overall execution in terms of production and the final methods of distribution and exhibition. Boyer's encounter with Hollywood in the early sound era reveals a fascinating insight into the mechanics of this process and into how, with the requisite amount of good chance and skilful handling that

Annabella seemed to miss out on, the system could work to enhance an individual's career

Boyer's initial appearances in the USA were on a short-term contract basis and, as we have seen, he was disappointed by the way the studios treated him. This is despite the fact that he had clearly been hired for his potential as a romantic lead. He had originally been recruited for his (French) speaking voice as much as his looks, and it was this aspect of his acting persona that was to be key to the economic clout he would wield by the end of the decade. His voice had dual appeal in the sense that it was, of course, conversant in two languages. Thalberg had arranged personal English-language tuition for Boyer at Paramount in order for him to improve the range of his spoken English, but all the studios were careful for the star never to lose the significant 'Frenchness' of his accent and projection. It could be foreign enough to be exotic, but, crucially, it could also be safe enough to be understood and admired by English-language audiences. In an industry ruthlessly mindful of the international potential of its representations of 'otherness', this is an important point.

There is clear evidence that Boyer understood the benefits of this position in the way that he also managed his financial affairs. Indeed, he seems to have been particularly adept at playing the system from a relatively early stage in his Hollywood career. By the time of his contract with Fox to appear in *Caravane*, for example, Boyer was anxious not to abandon the appeal of his voice for his native audience, and he stipulated that he must always dub his own performances for distribution in France.<sup>18</sup> One of his first acts on arriving in Los Angeles in 1934 was to hire a successful agent, Charles Feldman, who went on to play a crucial role in initiating a set of one-picture contracts for the actor. This arrangement would have been unusual in the Hollywood context but, interestingly, wholly typical of French working practices regarding the recruitment of stars. By 1936, Boyer had assembled an individualized administrative team which comprised an accountant, a financial advisor and a personal secretary. The actor thus always made sure his 'voice' was heard in other ways.

One of the most important people who listened to Boyer in Hollywood was the independent producer Walter Wanger, who secured roles for the French star in films such as *Private Worlds*, as well as *Shanghai* (James Flood, Paramount, 1935), *History is Made at Night* (Frank Borzage, United Artists, 1937) and *Algiers* (John Cromwell, United Artists, 1938). It was in the latter that he was asked to re-enact the role of Jean Gabin in *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier, Paris-Films-Productions, France, 1937), something he disliked intensely.<sup>19</sup> Wanger was bilingual, he had worked as an attaché to President Wilson at the Versailles Peace Conference, and by the mid 1930s had accumulated a range of valuable contacts through work experience with many of the major studios. He saw the

<sup>18</sup> See memo from George Wasson to G.S. Yorke, 19 June 1934, Fox Legal Files, Box LR 30, File 2358, UCLA Arts Special Collections.

<sup>19</sup> Cromwell 'would run a scene from the original and insist we do it the same way'. Boyer recalled: 'An actor never likes to copy another's style and here I was copying Jean Gabin, one of the greatest. Terrible, a perfectly terrible way to work.' See 'Boyer and some thoughts about the Casbah', *Woman's Day* (April 1950).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Clarke Wales, 'Hollywood's biggest gambler' in Walter Wanger clippings file, Margaret Herrick Library, American Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. For more on Wanger's career, see Bernstein, *Walter Wanger*.

<sup>21</sup> This sum compares to the \$1000 per week Boyer was paid by Paramount in *The Magnificent Lie* in 1931. See Paramount Pictures Corporation Collection File 853 Margaret Herrick Library, American Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

<sup>22</sup> See Charles Boyer Folder (Box 2824) in Warner Bros Archive, Arts Special Collections, Doheney Library, University of Southern California.

<sup>23</sup> Pressbook for *Tovarich*, British Film Institute National Film Library.

potential for Boyer to become a speaking Valentino for the US public: 'I had seen him in Europe. I knew what he could do, and I knew that he had something no one else had on the American screen.'<sup>20</sup> The producer's significance lay in a winning combination of his financial status and acumen within the Hollywood system, and his skill in placing the French star next to so many leading female actresses of the period. If we look, for example, at the details surrounding Boyer's appearance in *Tovarich* (Anatole Litvak, Warner Bros, 1937), we can gain an insight into how rapid the French actor's promotion in Hollywood was. Only two years after his first real US success, Wanger leased the star to Warners for eight weeks for the sum of \$100,000.<sup>21</sup> Boyer's co-star in the extravagant costume spectacular set in Paris was the top box-office draw Claudette Colbert, and it was arranged that the two would share billing above the titles.<sup>22</sup> Only Colbert's name was to appear before Boyer's in print or screened publicity, and in all cases their names were to appear in equal typesize.

The publicity surrounding *Tovarich* gives a further indication of the way Boyer was marketed within Hollywood. The promotional material for the film relied heavily on the conjugation of romance, emotion, authenticity, Frenchness and Paris, identified earlier. Much, for example, was made of the detailed work that had gone into Anton Grot's set recreations of the French capital – presumably suitable for two European stars that would know the city so well. The pressbook promised that 'the most elaborate preparations in history went into the filming of the kissing scene between Miss Colbert and Boyer'.<sup>23</sup> One poster image projected Colbert's and Boyer's faces in front of the Eiffel Tower with the caption: 'Colbert in Paris! Boyer in Love! Together in the Year's Swellest Comedy.'



Boyer and Claudette Colbert in *Tovarich* (Anatole Litvak, 1937).

The question of authenticity is an interesting one, in another aspect, for the narrative of the film actually concerns the mishaps of a Russian prince and princess who have fled the Revolution and are living in disguise as a maid and butler in a wealthy Parisian household. It suggests, then, that the fascination of Boyer's persona rested partly in a generalized notion of European sophistication that was truly non-American, rather than being something that was specifically French. Coupled with the idea of foreignness came a different reading of masculinity that was romantically attractive for both its alterity and its corresponding qualities of suaveness, intelligence and truthfulness. We see this conjugation again in the marketing of Boyer's role as Napoleon in *Conquest* (Clarence Brown, MGM, 1937). Here Boyer was teamed with Greta Garbo, and their apparent shared otherness was thus presented in an advantageous way to appeal to the US filmgoing public. 'The uniforms that Boyer wears in *'Conquest'* are authentic copies of those worn by Napoleon', the publicity went. In the hyperbole of the pressbook, a pre-prepared radio script, presented by Clarence Brown, confidently equated the national prestige of Boyer with the national greatness of Bonaparte himself.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Pressbook for *Conquest* British Film Institute National Film Library

Another key aspect of Boyer's successful persona rested in a certain combination of fidelity and intellectual concentration. Early on in his Hollywood career, the star had married a British actress – Pat Robertson – and he could not therefore be promoted as a footloose, romantically inclined French bachelor. Boyer's academic training, stable home life and apparent fine taste in his native food and wine therefore became the linchpins of many press stories. In 1936, for instance, it was reported that he would be importing his own champagne,<sup>25</sup> and the star was frequently pictured with his books in his personal library. As this type of coverage increased, so Boyer gradually became considered by many people to be an unofficial ambassador for a particular version of French high culture. This role took on two intersecting forms. First, the Boyer household became a conduit for many other French professionals arriving in Los Angeles, second, Boyer would later develop his interest in Franco-American cultural relations by establishing the French Research Foundation, which would play an important role during the war years. This deliberate positioning between the embracing of the new and the simultaneous guarding of the traditions of the old was perhaps one of the most durable secrets of the star's long-term appeal. It certainly accounts for the telling, but typical, anonymous press remark made about both Boyer and Tovarich: 'For once the continental touch has been brought within the field of ordinary American understanding'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Los Angeles Examiner* 1 November 1936

<sup>26</sup> *Motion Picture Daily* 2 December 1937

Annabella's own encounter with Hollywood's production system similarly reveals an insight into how the studios dealt with the phenomenon of European emigration during these years. By the time

27 Fox Legal Files Box 751 File  
2401 UCLA Arts Library Special  
Collections

of her second visit, it is clear from company records that Fox expected to make a major investment in the French actress. On 23 March 1937, she signed a contract with them for two films with an option on two subsequent features. After filming *The Baroness and the Butler*, a sophisticated comedy co-starring William Powell, she completed a new two-film contract with a significant price of \$75,000 per feature.<sup>27</sup> Annabella was taken under the wing of Darryl F. Zanuck, Fox's head of production, and offered a limited amount of tuition in her diction by a Miss Constance Collier. As in the case of Boyer, she was keen to protect the commercial potential of her voice and insisted that her contracts always retained the right for her to dub her own words in subsequent French releases. The quality of her voice was also an important part of Fox's overall investment in Annabella's potential popularity with the US public. Despite the efforts of the star to develop her spoken English, it is obvious that Zanuck and Fox went to great lengths to maintain her perceived 'Europeanness'.

28 *Motion Picture*, 13 November  
1937

She revealed to Gladys Hall, in an interview revealingly titled 'Don't let Hollywood change you, Annabella', that she had been told by Fox that 'we keep experts away from Annabella. We have ask Annabella to come here because she is Annabella and we keep her Annabella' (sic).<sup>28</sup> Zanuck revealed in one pressbook that the essence of Annabella's popularity would thus rest in her cultural difference. 'We have too many persons in Hollywood now who resemble one another', he argued. 'The public demands new faces, new personalities and we certainly can't fulfil that demand if we destroy freshness, vitality and originality by fitting each newcomer into one mould'.<sup>29</sup>

29 Pressbook for *The Baroness and the Butler*. British Film Institute  
National Film Library

Despite the fact that the French star was rather mysteriously cast as the flirtatious daughter of the prime minister of Hungary in *The Baroness and the Butler*, Annabella was nonetheless promoted extratextually as the studio's leading face of French sophistication. Press tie-ins prominently featured her sense of fashion and her cosmopolitan elegance. 'Simplicity is the keynote of Annabella's chic', noted one typical piece of pre-prepared press advertising. This note of Parisian *savoir-faire* accounts for the title of her proposed, and then abandoned, second feature, the somewhat ironically named *Let's Go to Paris*. It also points to one of the possible reasons for Annabella's relative lack of success. Simply put, the studio failed to match Annabella's successful European screen type with the right vehicles once she had arrived in the USA. In Europe, she had been known for her rather self-effacing and sentimental female roles, Fox, however, seemed unable to position her successfully, other than as a tamed and broad-based vision of continental glamour. There is also the question of language – the critics universally noted her poor command of spoken English. Perhaps most astute was the *Variety* critic who wrote tellingly of her US speaking debut that 'Annabella's

30 *Variety* 16 February 1938

faltering delivery of the English language is too great a handicap to be overcome even by a flattering camera ... She is miscast. The story selected for her ... is a light, frothy, continental comedy which calls for delicate shadings in speech and performance'.<sup>30</sup>

31 Notes from script conference for first draft continuity script (1 March 1938) p. 8 in Daryl Zanuck file, Arts Special Collections, Doheney Library, University of Southern California

Fox got the fit wrong again in *Suez*, Annabella's next feature. In a role originally conceived with her compatriot, Simone Simon in mind, Annabella was asked to be the humorous, zestful and boyish romantic foil to Ferdinand de Lesseps (Tyrone Power). Perhaps in a concession to her still limited linguistic abilities, it was proposed at a relatively early script conference to render her unable to read or write.<sup>31</sup> As the project evolved, it becomes clear looking through the Fox archives that the studio wanted a historical, not a romantic, drama and the film that was finally released offered little real opportunity to develop the marketing concerns initiated previously by the publicity department. With the clandestine affair and subsequent marriage between Annabella and Tyrone Power, Fox seemed willing to relinquish their ambitions for the French actress. Many years later, Annabella revealed in an interview that she had actually discovered that the disapproving Zanuck had placed her on an unofficial blacklist following the scandal – a revealing example of the degree of paternalistic patronage with which a non-native female star had to live under the studio system. Zanuck's moralism can be seen here as part of Hollywood's broader cultural shift on feminine representation in the later 1930s, as bold and dangerous screen behaviour by female stars became curtailed. From this point on Annabella's film career waned, but it did not stop MGM pointedly changing the title of her final film of the decade, when it was released, from *Maiden Voyage* to the more headline-grabbing and apposite *Bridal Suite*.

### Performing bodies and mobile voices

We have seen, so far, how Boyer and Annabella were both brought to Hollywood partly on the basis of their voices, recruited as much to be heard as to be seen. If we now turn to the question of their performances, in particular Boyer's, we may see how further evidence for their varying levels of success during the early sound era also reveals crucially different levels of interaction between the performer, the camera and the new sound recording technology.

By the mid 1930s, US sound cinema had already evolved to the extent that with the aid of new lighter and more compact microphones, there had been a shift from the initial spatially-variable levels of sound quality to what Rick Altman has termed 'a continuous sound track of nearly level volume and unbroken close-up characteristics'.<sup>32</sup> Altman argues that with this development, 'the criterion of intelligibility of dialogue [still] retained its primary importance'.<sup>33</sup> In addition to this concentration on audition and

32 Rick Altman 'Sound space' in Altman (ed.) *Sound Theory Sound Practice* (New York: Routledge 1992) p. 54

33 *Ibid.* p. 58

characterization, one may note a renewed contiguous interest in the skilled integration of the script, actor's voice and actor's body. As Cynthia Baron has shown, the Hollywood studio system during these years was both fascinated and tested by the new demands of the body's role in audiovisual storytelling.<sup>34</sup> If we must see the actor's body as an integral part of the way a single film project was conceived, developed, marketed and received, we must also therefore acknowledge the role that acting itself played in terms of narration and spectatorial pleasure. The studios set about hiring dialogue coaches, for example, and dialogue directors were employed to assist performers with specific aspects of scenes involving heavy amounts of the spoken word. Crucially, for the basis of this paper, professional acting experts, such as Lilian Burns at MGM, were recruited to initiate acting training programmes in the belief that the trained performer would best serve a mode of production predicated on the centrality of the interpretation of the written script. Seen in this light, then, someone like Boyer became a different kind of professional investment than his compatriot Annabella. Whilst Boyer came from a long-established background in live stage performance, and had toured widely outside France before coming to the USA, Annabella was a recent and less-experienced acting phenomenon, more uniquely restricted to being a national star in the context of a single popular European cinema.

Baron quotes an acting teacher of the time's remark that 'the fundamental difference between acting on the stage and the screen [was] the size of the actor from the viewpoint of the audience'.<sup>35</sup> There is clear evidence that Boyer learnt this lesson early in his US film career, as the publicity for *Caravan* suggests in the ways it details the expressive potential of his physiognomy. It noted, for example, that 'with the soulful, romantic eyes of a poet, but the physique of a prize-fighter, Boyer is an anomaly [He is] courteous, soft-spoken and retiring, [yet his face possesses] a remarkable mobility'.<sup>36</sup> If we look at *History is Made at Night*, one of Boyer's later Hollywood films of the 1930s, we can see again how adept the actor was at using both his voice and eyes to captivate the filmgoing audience. The film is fascinating for the way in which Boyer's vocal and gestural qualities become absorbed by a narrative which fictionalizes the same destabilizing process of cultural migration simultaneously being experienced on a personal level by the star and promoted on an extratextual level by the industry. Boyer plays the role of a French gentleman burglar in Paris who interrupts the marital sting arranged by a US shipping magnate (Colin Clive). The businessman wishes to put his wife Irène (Jean Arthur) in a compromising position with the couple's chauffeur, but he is foiled when Boyer and Arthur themselves end up spending a romantic evening together. Irène returns to the USA, but Boyer follows her and gets a job as the head waiter in an exclusive society restaurant.

34 Cynthia Baron, 'Crafting film performances: acting in the Hollywood studio era' in Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer (eds) *Screen Acting* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 31–45.

35 Baron 'Crafting film performances' p. 37.

36 Pressbook for *Caravan* British Film Institute National Film Library.

His attempt to lure the object of his desire succeeds, and the couple both become temporary exiles as they plan to set off for Haiti. In Boyer's early scenes his features are deliberately masked, but the lighting is carefully organized to accentuate the mercurial whiteness of his eyes. Subsequent set pieces also make good use, in closeup, of the expressive potential of his eyebrows. It is as if a constant ironic register is being maintained by the interplay between Boyer's suggestive eyes and the suave appeal of his accent. This sense of a deliberate focus on performance and a certain tamed exoticism – heavily dependent on coded notions of cultural authority over such things as fine food and wine – is crucial to the way the film articulates Boyer's role. For instance, in an early scene set in the back of a taxi, whilst Boyer's character is still unidentified to the wealthy American, the couple converse about the need to help a shocked Irène. Boyer charmingly suggests a little drink. 'But where?', she asks. 'Leave it to me. I know the best champagne in Paris', comes the forceful reply.

The mobility of the character Boyer plays is also conveyed through the theme of ventriloquism. In one sense, this works as a means to foreground the actor's technique, but in another it seals the crucial theme of changed bodies that the film describes and Boyer's life encompasses. Boyer's seduction of Arthur at the dining table revolves around the act of performing with his hands and with his eyes the pretend identity of a distinguished French woman. The camera is constantly alert to the range of the actor's gestures as he makes his partner laugh at his ability to assume the identity of a compatriot. For the spectator, however, there is a possible doubling of pleasure available in this sequence for we witness here the extraordinary conflation of a well-known French actor in the USA actually embodying a French man acting a French woman whilst supposedly in France. The film, as a whole, progresses with this theme of 'finding a voice' in that it revolves around Irène's romantic search to locate a role for her emotional longings and her choice between two differently coded vocalized versions of masculine appeal. Colin Clive, another emigre actor, is therefore clearly cast for his long angular jaw, veiled eyes and hard sharp voice, whilst his French counterpart appears with round features, open, alert and clear eyes and a distinctive softness of timbre in speech.

Boyer's narrative journey from disguise to something authentically Parisian in *History is Made at Night* in fact mirrors the history of his own career trajectory in Hollywood. If he started the decade often playing the 'foreigner', he ended it as the archetypal 'French lover'. Wanger's perception of Boyer's potential as the sound-era's Valentino had thus been accurate. This was a 'fit' that Annabella never completely succeeded in finding. In one sense her timing had been wrong: she did not benefit in the same way as Boyer did from business contacts and stage training, and she did not receive the

same successful roles that related to a pre-established European persona. In another sense there was the question of gender and agency. In *Suez*, for instance, the camera sometimes seems more interested in observing her legs than her eyes and mind. Her role is essentially decorative and, whilst humorous, it is subsequently relegated in terms of narrative significance. The French actress is characteristically adept as a foil to the decorum and stature of her rival in love, the Empress Eugenie, but the film evidently does not know what to do with her impetuous character. Her somewhat awkward persona – her English is still quite poor – is inserted in an unsuitable vehicle and the character inevitably dies. In more than one sense her voice is simply not heard and thus she does not join in.

This question of 'joining in' or integration is clearly central to any understanding of the place of the European actor in the Hollywood studio system. In conclusion, the industry wanted to tread a fine line between assimilation and the preservation of a cultural difference that would have a distinctive national and international commercial appeal. This equivocal and problematic process – less characteristic when considering the wider terrain of Hollywood's strategy of overseas recruitment of directors and technicians – reveals a complex set of questions regarding cultural expectation, financial management and onscreen performance. At a time when Hollywood aimed to recuperate the heterogeneity of the European accent and create something obviously global in potential, the tension between the promise of reinvention and the seal of authenticity was always going to be managed differently according to the individual actor. This process depended not only upon the inevitable conflation of cultural baggage and acting skills the actor carried, but also on the crucial question of articulation: how the actors spoke as stars, how they were spoken to by agents and producers, and how they were spoken about by publicity directors, critics and audiences. In considering the cases of Annabella and Boyer, we may thus surmise that although these two French stars shared a common tongue, they simply possessed different voices.

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#### **Charles Boyer's career in Hollywood 1929–39**

*Le procès de Mary Dugan* (Marcel de Sano, MGM, 1929)

*Révolte dans la prison* (Paul Féjos, MGM, 1930)

*The Magnificent Lie* (Berthold Viertel, Paramount, 1931)

*The Man From Yesterday* (Berthold Viertel, Paramount, 1932)

*The Red-Headed Woman* (Jack Conway, MGM, 1932)

*Caravan and Caravane* (Erik Charell, Twentieth Century Fox, 1934)

*Private Worlds* (Gregory La Cava, Paramount, 1935)

*Break of Hearts* (Phillip Moeller, RKO, 1935)  
*Shanghai* (James Flood, Paramount, 1935)  
*The Garden of Allah* (Richard Boleslawski, United Artists, 1936)  
*History is Made at Night* (Frank Borzage, United Artists, 1937)  
*Conquest* (Clarence Brown, MGM, 1937)  
*Tovarich* (Anatole Litvak, Warner Bros, 1937)  
*Algiers* (John Cromwell, United Artists, 1938)  
*Love Affair* (Leo McCarey, RKO, 1939)  
*When Tomorrow Comes* (John M. Stahl, Universal, 1939)

**Annabella's career in Hollywood 1929–39**

*Caravane* (Erik Charell, Twentieth Century Fox, 1934)  
*The Baroness and the Butler* (Walter Lang, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938)  
*Suez* (Allan Dwan, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938)  
*Bridal Suite* (William Thiele, MGM, 1939)

# Danielle Darrieux, Michèle Morgan and Micheline Presle in Hollywood: the threat to French identity

GENEVIÈVE SELLIER

From the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1950s – a crucial period for the construction of French identity through its cinema – French actors made attempts, with varying degrees of success, to build careers in Hollywood. Among these actors, three major French stars succeeded in the sense that they made one or more films in Hollywood, but failed because the reception of these films was not, at the time of their release in the USA and France, in any way commensurate with their popularity at home.

In 1938, Danielle Darrieux made *The Rage of Paris*, directed by Henri Koster and released in the USA and in Paris (as *La Coqueluche de Paris*) in the same year. Michèle Morgan left for Hollywood towards the end of 1940 to make *Joan of Paris* (Robert Stevenson, 1942), *Two Tickets to London* (Edwin L. Martin, 1943), *Higher and Higher* (Tim Whelan, 1943; released in Paris in 1947 as *Amour et Swing*), *Passage to Marseilles* (Michael Curtiz, 1944) and *The Chase* (Arthur Ripley, 1946, released in Paris in the same year as *L'Évadée*). Micheline Presle appeared in Jean Negulesco's *Under my Skin* (1949; released in Paris in 1950 as *La Belle de Paris*), followed by Fritz Lang's *American Guerrilla in the Philippines* (1950, released in 1951 in Paris as *Guerrillas*) and *The Adventures of Captain Fabian* (Bill Marshall, 1950; released in 1951 in Paris as *La Taverne de la Nouvelle Orleans*). Darrieux was to make renewed attempts after the war with three brief excursions to Hollywood for *Rich, Young and Pretty* (Norman Taurog, 1950, released in Paris as

*Riche, jeune et jolie*), *Five Fingers* (Joseph Mankiewicz, 1951; released in Paris in 1952 as *L’Affaire Cicéron*) and *Alexander the Great* (Robert Rossen, 1954, released in Paris in 1956 as *Alexandre le grand*)

None of Darrieux’s, Morgan’s or Presle’s films had any major impact in the press of the time, except for *Five Fingers* for reasons that had nothing to do with Darrieux’s performance or with cinephilia.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, these attempts at a Hollywood career by French stars generated abundant press coverage that focused principally on the clash of cultural identities. It is the nature and the evolution of these discourses that I wish to examine here. In addition, I want to offer an analysis of the films and their reception in the USA, in order to compare the US construction of French identity with the French understanding of the clash between France and Hollywood, and to trace the evolution of these sets of ideas before and after the war.

The status of the press discourses surrounding these three stars must first be defined. The fact is that press reports put forward by newspapers such as *Paris-Soir* and *France-Dimanche* and popular film weeklies such as *Cinémonde* relied chiefly on statements from the actresses which were, of course, rewritten to suit the magazines’ assumptions of what their readers expected. The stars, insofar as the publications echoed their statements, also expressed themselves according to what they assumed to be the expectations of their audience. As Richard Dyer has shown,<sup>2</sup> all these discourses may collude to construct a star’s image which is at least as resonant as the one produced by the films in which the star appears. In this paper, I will be less concerned with the stars’ actual images than in the way these images then participated in building French identity through an encounter with Hollywood.

Danielle Darrieux, who had become a top-billing star in France in the mid 1930s, signed a contract with Universal studios in January 1937. In September of that year she left for Hollywood with her husband–manager Henri Decoin, amid the pomp worthy of the star she had become. The five-year contract she signed stipulated that she would make two films per year in Hollywood, but she reserved the right to come back to France each year to make two films there too. Though she arrived in Hollywood in October 1937, it was only in March 1938 that she started work on *The Rage of Paris*, co-starring Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.

As soon as it was announced that she had signed her contract, popular newspapers wrote abundant commentaries on her ‘adventure’ which would continue to unfold until the war. From the start, the emphasis was put on the conditions set by the couple so that Darrieux could continue to make films in France, and also on the

<sup>1</sup> The film was seen in the press as an example of the way in which Hollywood tended to distort historical truth in favour of cheap fiction. The extraordinary story of a real-life double agent had recently been revealed in the French media by L.C. Moyzisch: the *attache* to the German Embassy. Darrieux’s character of the Polish countess in this drama was perceived as the height of Hollywood conformism. in *Arts* 3 July 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Dyer *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979).

fabulous sum offered to her by Hollywood. In other words, on the importance she gave her French identity and on the value placed on her by Hollywood. The screenplay of *The Rage of Paris*, approved by Decoin after rejecting five proposals from Universal, was a way of resolving this contradiction. The story of a young French woman trying her luck in the USA by any means possible was a bit too light-hearted (in other words a bit too French) for Deanna Durbin, Henri Koster's usual leading lady

*The Rage of Paris* can be interpreted as a metaphor for its founding project: a nice young French woman wants to conquer the New World by marrying a millionaire but her very amateurish methods are repeatedly thwarted by a brilliant representative of American capitalism (Douglas Fairbanks, Jr), although in the end he comes to recognise her virtues and their confrontation is finally resolved by love and marriage – thus safeguarding both the American millionaire's freedom of choice and the little French woman's powers of seduction. The last scene shows them embarking for France on a liner whose captain will later marry them. The happy ending of the young couple's departure for Europe echoed the permanent return of the Darrieux-Decoin couple as soon as shooting was finished. Moreover, Darrieux's and Decoin's statements to the press were a constant reminder of what the film's fiction had to resolve magically, namely the economic and cultural war between the two national cinemas where an unequal balance of power acted as a dynamic.

Thus, as well as supervising the preparation of his young wife's first US movie (there was more than twenty years difference between them), Decoin declared from Hollywood that he approved the recommendations of the two main French film unions (the *Chambre Syndicale* and the *CGT*) who 'felt that French actors working abroad owed at least a film a year to their country to protect the French film industry'.<sup>3</sup> As soon as the couple returned to France, he reassured the French public as to Darrieux's Frenchness: 'I think that Danielle Darrieux is the only celebrity who has managed to keep her personality in Hollywood. She still wears the same make-up, has kept her own eyelashes, her natural hair colour, her habits, her pouts, her expressions, she has stayed a hundred per cent French!'<sup>4</sup>

Darrieux returned to France in May 1938 to a triumphant welcome from her fans and went on to make *Katia* with director Maurice Tourneur. She then fell ill and in October declined to go back to Hollywood to make *Rio* with Anatole Litvak. Instead, she signed a contract with the European producer Gregor Rabinovitch stipulating that she make one film per year for four years, this being supposedly compatible with her career in Hollywood, where she would spend six months a year. *The Rage of Paris* was released in Paris in June 1938 and earned her the best actress prize at the Venice Film Festival.

In January 1939, Darrieux's refusal to return to Hollywood was

3 *Paris-Soir* 7 May 1938

4 *Paris-Soir* 28 May 1938

5 *Paris Soir* 16 February 1939

announced, as was the fact that Marlene Dietrich would replace her on *Rio*. Universal sent an emissary to convince her to honour her contract, but in vain. From then on, from her retreat in Megève in the French Alps, she made disparaging comments about Hollywood 'They want to change my face, change my hairstyle, they want to give me another soul, well, enough is enough . . . I like it here and I won't go back to the United States'.<sup>5</sup> Decoin tried to minimize the whole affair by announcing that she was going to make a second film in Hollywood before the winter.

6 Non-identified article,  
16 November 1940 Darrieux  
dossier Bibliothèque de  
l'Arsenal Paris

In March 1939, Darrieux announced that she was leaving for Hollywood to shoot *Sous les ponts de Paris*, to be directed by Anatole Litvak, with John Barrymore as co-star, and that she would probably stay there for two years and make four films. But first she made *Battement de coeur* in France, directed by Decoin, though shooting was interrupted by the war and Decoin re-enlisted as a squadron leader. He finished the film thanks to the leave he obtained during the 'phony war'. *Battement de coeur* was released in February 1940. In November, Darrieux told a popular magazine: 'I have been advised not to go back to Hollywood for now, and I was made to understand that I should get back to Paris and participate in the resurrection of French cinema . . . Within six weeks or even a month, I will start a new film in one of our Parisian studios'<sup>6</sup>

She recalled her time in Hollywood for *Cinémonde* in 1946:

7 *Cinémonde* 7th May 1946  
No 614

It was both enchanting and unbearable, charming and monstrous . . . something struck me as soon as I arrived. the way publicity operates there I did not work for five months . . . during which time they were looking for a screenplay for me. Henri read the one that were submitted to him. . . He ruled five out Finally, he liked *The Rage of Paris* A few weeks later, the shooting script was ready I started to work. Filming lasted three months Soon afterwards, we left Hollywood . . . The best memory I have kept from the capital city of cinema, is of the stars I met there . . . I did not find it too hard to comply with the demands and the working conditions in America.<sup>7</sup>

This short-lived attempt by a French actress to lead a career on both sides of the Atlantic was without doubt more of a dream than a reality; there is no other example of it in France at the time But the fact that those concerned, at least on the French side, could actually have imagined it, indicates how French cultural identity, as it was then constructed in the cinema, fed upon an love/hate relationship with the great American competitor. The ultimate recognition for a star, in any case a female star, was to go to Hollywood, but this was accompanied by the mortal danger of being swallowed up by it Considering that at the time the Hollywood majors imposed five-year or seven-year contracts to all the actors they hired, it could only be a fool's bargain. RKO did try to sue Darrieux, but the case was

suspended because of the war. However, the latent war between France and Hollywood did not stop, as the adventures of Michèle Morgan show.

Morgan had refused offers from America after *Le Quai des brumes* and gone to Berlin to make two films, *Le Récif de corail* (Maurice Gleize, 1938) and *L'Entraîneuse* (Albert Valentin, 1938). She then came back to France for *Les Musiciens du ciel* (Georges Lacombe, 1940), *La Loi du nord* (Jacques Feyder, 1940) and *Remorques* (Jean Grémillon, 1941). This last film was interrupted by the war and completed during the 'phony war'. Lastly, at the beginning of 1940, she undertook *Untel père et fils*, directed by Julien Duvivier, completed and released in the US but not in France. After the *débacle*, from the South of France where she had found refuge, Morgan reopened talks with RKO and arrived in Hollywood at the end of 1940 where she actively started to learn English and to submit to every request the studio made of her. Morgan's Hollywood stay (1940–46), although longer and more productive than Darrieux's, would to a large extent remain unknown to the French public. This is how she recounted it to *Cinéma* in 1947:

The 'debacle' took my family and me by surprise at La Baule. As I had signed a contract the previous year to make films in America for two companies (RKO and Universal), I immediately tried to get to the so-called Free Zone to be able to fulfill my contracts and in September I left France with a heavy heart. I got to the United States via Spain and Portugal. In Lisbon, I boarded a clipper... I discovered that Hollywood, deep down, was just a little provincial town. This is because over there, work is vital. In Hollywood there is less freedom and a less lively atmosphere than in France, but greater organization and comfort. The studios are more factory-like than in France and above all opinions diverge about the end result to be achieved. My first American film was *Joan of Paris* for RKO. I thought at the time that it was a good story – three followed. Lastly, this year I made *The Chase* with Robert Cummings. It will be, I think, my best American film but it won't be as good as the ones I had the good fortune to make in France.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michèle Morgan, 'My first memories', *Cinéma* Christmas Stars' special album, December 1947.

In fact for the postwar French press, Morgan's stay in the USA became symbolic of the straying of French actresses to Hollywood. The press hounded her, forgetting the peculiar circumstances, to say the least, which led to her hasty departure and five-year stay far from her mother country. Indeed, the tone of her 'memories' shows that she largely internalized this condemnation, as if it was implicitly the price to pay to be back in favour. Her case demonstrates how French national identity was rebuilt after the war through the erasure of the

defeat and the five years of German occupation which led to emigres being suspected of desertion, or at the very least of having engineered a way to escape these dark years. In the film community, the old rivalry with Hollywood made things even worse. Thus, *Noir et Blanc* said in September 1945, just before Morgan's return to her home country

She views her comeback with a certain apprehension because Hollywood's makeup artists and beauticians have changed her to such an extent that we won't recognize her anymore. In *Two Tickets to London*, shot in Hollywood with Alan Curtis, she is very blonde, incredibly provocative, and to tell the truth, barely recognizable. Our readers are warned: they will not see the gamine face of *Gribouille* or even the wispy hair of *Quai des brumes*. These times are gone and the only recognizable features of the star are her strange, unreal eyes, her transparent gaze, the colour of dreams, watching your words, your every move, clinging onto you and hovering over your mind.<sup>9</sup>

9 *Noir et Blanc*, September 1945

Three out of the four Hollywood films she made during this period were not distributed in France, even after the Liberation. *Higher and Higher*, with Frank Sinatra, was released in Paris in January 1947 and very badly received. According to *France-Dimanche*

Michèle Morgan admits that she left for Hollywood seven years too soon: 'I was misled. I shouldn't have left for Hollywood. The films I made there have made me look ridiculous in France and I wonder how they can still love me here'. This is the tragedy of Michèle Morgan's life, she whose only dream was Hollywood. But success has eluded her. Hollywood gave her everything except stardom. She wants above all to leave behind the impressive series of turkeys she made in the USA. Parisian audiences were dumbfounded to see her tousled-haired, dancing and singing with Frank Sinatra. She quickly found out how French audiences reacted and, downcast, locked herself in her Hollywood home and refused to read Parisian newspapers.<sup>10</sup>

10 *France Dimanche* 24 July 1947

After *La Symphonie pastorale* (Jean Delannoy, 1946), Morgan returned briefly to Hollywood and made *The Chase*, released in Paris in February 1948. It was slated by critics at the Cannes film festival and by the newspaper *Le Monde* among others. 'This film by A. Ripley has at least the merit to show how a great actress can, if badly directed, become second-rate: in this film Michèle Morgan is the victim of such mediocrity'.<sup>11</sup> This irrevocable judgement of her Hollywood career was shared throughout the press. Only the return of the actress to France brought a change of tone in that it was recognized that the woman had been able to preserve her prewar French identity.

11 *Le Monde* 17 September 1947

She hasn't changed. Hollywood has not made her more sophisticated. On the contrary . . . her hair is back to its natural colour . . . She dresses the American way but New York fashion has not altered her allure as a little Parisian woman, who, by the way, was born in Dieppe<sup>12</sup>

12 *Paris-Matin* 27 November 1945

Jean Delannoy's *La Symphonie pastorale* which today brings her worldwide recognition shows that Michèle Morgan has not lost her French sensibility<sup>13</sup>

13 *Cinémonde* no 638  
23 November 1946

When *Higher and Higher* was released, *Cinémonde* summed things up conclusively

There is a Michèle Morgan case. Which isn't unique. The case of a *Grande dame* of the screen, a great artist, who, in America, was not able to impose her personality. This leads us to believe that American directors did not really allow her talent to flourish . . . Let's laugh it off and, nevertheless, carry on trusting Michèle Morgan.<sup>14</sup>

14 *Cinémonde* no 652 28 January  
1947

Subsequently, *Cinémonde* even suggested a rereading of her Hollywood career

She should have played the female lead in *Casablanca* but didn't because she was more expensive than Ingrid Bergman, having arrived with an international star contract . . . She is better at expressing physical fragility and mystery. She would today have Ingrid Bergman's status. In the meantime, she has to make do with being Mrs Marshall and preparing to shoot *Jeanne d'Arc* for Delannoy<sup>15</sup>

15 *Cinémonde* no 649 19 March  
1947

Morgan's return to favour materialized with the Best Actress Prize awarded by *Cinémonde*'s readers in 1946 for her role in *La Symphonie pastorale*, which also won Best Film.<sup>16</sup> Without doubt, the cross Morgan's character Gertrud had to bear in this film helped the performer regain her popularity with the public and the critics, after 'prostituting' her image in the Hollywood 'dream factory'. It is worth quoting at length the following assessment of Morgan by *Concorde*

16 *Cinémonde* no 663 15 April  
1947

Who has forgotten this ever so French figure who appeared one evening on our screens? This charming face, a little shy, with such graceful features, nearly exhausted, it seems, by centuries of civilization. Just as any French landscape could be the work of man, the face of any one of our girls keeps the nobility of a long heredity . . . Its contours are moderate so that the faintest expression may gain in value; the complexion is delicate so that the most fleeting emotion gives it a pale flush. The lines of the body are supple, along with the mood, in order never to break, the walk is measured but it leads to a precise goal, sentimental

diversions correspond to a simple demonstration that the straight line is not the shortest way.

Hollywood took hold of it. In this amazing factory, like the ones in Chicago, they mix a Swedish, an Italian, a Mexican, a Hungarian, a French and an English woman to produce a string of six American stars as spotless as a Buick, as pink as an ice-cream, as natural as cucumber paste and as international as a sleeping car.

Back to us she came, blonde with shoulder-length hair, shining so perfectly from her forehead to the train of her dress, that even a fly landing on her would get vertigo, so strictly masked by makeup that she doesn't appear mysterious any more, so true to advertising that the enigma she has become could be guessed by Oedipus only if he transformed himself into a cute little baby. Then we saw her again in André Gide's extraordinarily challenging *La Symphonie pastorale*. This blind woman has eyes made of light. Emotions revived her face and restored it to us, expressiveness renewed the suppleness of her body and her mind triumphed over mirages.<sup>17</sup>

17 *Concorde*, 12 October 1946

After the war, despite the official position as ally that the new French authorities had managed to wrench, with difficulty, from the USA, the rivalry between French cinema and Hollywood became an open fight. The mixture of derision and hostility that permeated press coverage of Morgan's Hollywood 'performance' indicates that any compromise had become impossible: any collaboration (sic) with Hollywood was perceived as a treason to French identity. Overall, the press, including the popular press, built up an opposition between the high cultural quality of French cinema and Hollywood's financial alienation.<sup>18</sup>

18 The caricatural anti-American discourse of *L'Écran français* is more easily understandable in this context. But one can also assess how provocative the pro-US discourse of *Cahiers du cinéma* was.

When, in 1947, it was Micheline Presle's turn to be lured by the sirens' song, she appeared to be enjoying more favourable conditions since she was backed by her French producer Paul Graetz after the European success of *Le Diable au corps* (Claude Autant-Lara, 1946). Before leaving, she was careful to distance herself from Hollywood as when interviewed by *Cinéma*:

'On the eve of your departure for Hollywood, could you tell us how you imagine this Hollywood that you only know from hearsay?'

'Hollywood? I imagine it to be like a box of sweets. Very nice, very clean but no doubt quickly tiresome. Probably because of a lack of the picturesque.'<sup>19</sup>

19 *Cinéma* no. 658, 11 March 1947

On her return at the beginning of 1948 from what she called a 'field trip', she informed the weekly magazine that 'she has seen *Le Diable au corps* in Hollywood... but at a private screening' (the film was

20 *Cinémonde* no 707 17 March 1948

21 *Le Film français* awarded its prizes to Presle Pierre Fresnay and the film *Monsieur Vincent* whereas *Cinémonde* readers rewarded Presle Gerard Philipe and *Le Diable au Corps* (*Cinémonde* no 715 4 May 1948)

22 *Cinémonde* no 777 11 July 1949

23 *Cinémonde* no 797 14 November 1949

24 As early as 1945 Fox had acquired the rights to the book written by a US war correspondent – the true story of a US officer who fought for two years with Filipino guerrillas under the Japanese occupation. The project was to be directed by Henry King but the US victory had rendered it obsolete. Fox took it up again in 1950 because it needed a vehicle for Tyrone Power. Location shooting in the Philippines also acted as a guarantee of authenticity. The studio decided to change the identity of the woman with whom the US officer has an affair for casting reasons, she became French. Presle was the only person not to have grounds for complaint about Lang's direction, as she shared his nostalgic feelings for Europe and his resentment against Hollywood. Lang was making this film to free himself from his obligations with Fox before being able to work on a project close to his heart *The Secret Beyond the Door* for his own production company Diana Productions. Lang vented his anger for having to churn out this commission on *Power* and the shooting went badly under the watchful eyes of Daryl Zanuck's spies (Zanuck was in charge of the production and final cut).

banned in the USA). She then declared: 'I will never sign a long-term contract. Above all, I want to work in France.'<sup>20</sup> Her popularity with French audiences was confirmed by the 1947 *victoires du cinéma* that were jointly awarded to her by *Cinémonde* and *Le Film Français* readers in May 1948.<sup>21</sup> But her projects with Graetz (in particular Max Ophüls's *Letter From an Unknown Woman* [1948]) were put in jeopardy by her amorous encounter with Bill Marshall (then married to Michèle Morgan, who was soon to leave him). This led Morgan to sign a two-film contract with Fox in August 1948 for a fee of \$40,000 per film. In fact, she had lost all agency, but she put a reassuring spin on her situation to *Cinémonde* nearly a year later, in July 1949 (under the revealing title 'I am a Hollywoodian'), explaining that she refused all publicity until her first film was released.

*Le Diable au corps* has just been released in New York, the reviews are excellent but it is bad timing because of the summer season. . . I intend to be back in Paris at the end of the year, I will then probably make *Sarah Bernhardt*, not in England, but in France, on condition that the film be shot in a French and an English version. I might also appear in *The Fabulous Ann Madlock*. It is the extraordinary story of a French Creole woman from New Orleans, for which we have just bought the rights. Our intention is, if at all possible, to try and make this film in France. . . I would like to find a good play to perform in when I return. . . Life in Hollywood is much quieter than in Paris, the atmosphere provincial. America is a big country and living here is nice, but for me, Paris is still the most beautiful city in the world. . . and France is so nice, even seen from afar.<sup>22</sup>

After the Marshall–Morgan divorce, Presle married Marshall in September 1949 in California while she was shooting *Under My Skin* under the pseudonym Micheline Puelle. The film, a male melodrama typical of those made in the USA in the postwar period, was adapted from a Hemingway novella, *My Old Man*, and co-starred John Garfield. In it, she played 'a French singer in love with a jockey'.<sup>23</sup> The film had a limited impact in France. To honour her contract with Fox, she then made *American Guerilla in the Philippines* in the early summer of 1950, directed by Fritz Lang<sup>24</sup> and co-starring Tyrone Power. It was a war film and promoted as such. The female part, hardly surprisingly, was meagre, despite the romantic fiddling added by the scriptwriters. It was a bitter failure, critically and commercially. Here is a sample of its French critical reception.

What is there to say or rather not to say, about the appalling love story that they thought right to add to make it commercial! The numerous embraces between Tyrone Power and Micheline Presle may be photogenic, to me they seemed false, syrupy and sickly

Poor Micheline Presle Poor heroine of *Diable au corps* (*Devil in the Flesh*), condemned, in the USA, to bogus charms and impersonal embraces where neither devil nor flesh gains anything out of it<sup>25</sup>

25 Simone Dubreuilh in *Liberation*, 27 August 1959

Micheline Presle's Hollywood 'career' ended with *The Adventures of Captain Fabian*, produced and directed in France by Marshall, co-starring Errol Flynn<sup>26</sup> It is her sole US film where she has the leading role, but the film suffers from the conditions of production and from the inexperience of its director This frenziedly romantic story of a woman from the New Orleans French aristocracy who decides to avenge her reversals of fortune by murder and blackmail, meanwhile spurning the only man who sincerely loves her (Errol Flynn), confirms that the image of the French woman in Hollywood after the war was, to say the least, problematic: sexual object or formidable schemer

26 It seems that the film was initially going to be directed by Robert Florey from a novella by Nathaniel Hawthorne in which Errol Flynn was interested (he is credited for the screenplay) But Marshall quarrelled with Florey, who let him direct and then with Errol Flynn to the extent that the actor left the studio before the end of shooting The last scene was shot with a body-double

As with the two preceding films, and even though it was released in France, *The Adventures of Captain Fabian* was hardly visible in the press, even in the popular press, during its Parisian release, and it had little success with the public. Traces of it can be found in *Cinémonde*, through production stills sent by Presle to the newspaper,<sup>27</sup> accompanied by a synopsis of the film This indicates that she was trying to maintain contact with French audiences, but the reception of this third US film was not an improvement on the previous ones, as evidenced by this comment made upon the French release:

27 *Cinémonde* no 811 10 February 1950 Tyrone Power's new co-star Micheline Prelle [sic] presents American fashion with eight stills of the dresses she wears in *The Big Fall* (originally called *Under My Skin*) where she plays a French singer For *Cinémonde* this indicates new American fashion trends See also *Cinémonde* 24 April 1950 in which Micheline Presle is on the cover for *Under my Skin* In *Cinémonde* no 866, 10 March 1951, under the headline Micheline Presle will meet you in a New Orleans tavern the actress tells the story of the film This feature is accompanied by eleven production stills

Another film where murders are too easily committed Lea, though played by Micheline Presle with a certain touch lacks sympathy . and this makes the film fairly tough and even cynical in some places, a spectacular movie rather than an harmonious work<sup>28</sup>

28 *France-Magazine* no 187 22 April 1951

29 Her daughter is the French actress and director Toni Marshall

The pregnant Micheline Presle came back to France in 1951 (having refused Mankiewicz's *Five Fingers*, made later with Darrieux) to divorce and to give birth<sup>29</sup> But within two years, French cinema seemed to have forgotten her The commercial failure of *L'Amour d'une femme* (Jean Grémillon, 1953), which did not even find a distributor, confirmed the bankruptcy of her cinematic career From then on, she had to be content with supporting roles in prestigious films (for instance Sacha Guitry's historical films), and, more often than not, with appearing in B-movies or going into professional exile in Italy

Presle had gone to the USA at a crucial moment in the French film industry's fight against Hollywood The controversial Blum-Byrne agreements of 1946 which attempted to regulate the amount of US films entering the French market had to be renegotiated in 1948 – towards slightly more favourable conditions

for the French – in view of the outcry from French film professionals. Most importantly, the *loi d'aide* instituting state subsidies was also passed in September 1948. Hollywood cinema was seen by the French film industry as an adversary which was at once economic, ideological and cultural, its values of profitability and easy seduction directly threatened the survival of French cinema despite, or because of, its artistic ambitions. The *loi d'aide* thus levied a tax on all cinema tickets sold that was then paid back to French film producers to allow the industry to rebuild in a postwar climate of hostility to Hollywood directly aggravated by the new Cold War. The battle for French cinema, initiated by the trade unions and industrial associations sympathetic to the Communist Party, thus appeared as a struggle for the defence of national identity.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that these circumstances, aggravated by the mediocrity of her Hollywood performances, provoked a long-lasting confusion over Presle's image for French audiences. For instance, in July 1950, *L'Ecran français* published Jean-Charles Tacchella's in-depth survey of the French in Hollywood entitled 'Hollywood back and forth'.<sup>31</sup> Tacchella ended his piece with this prohibitive conclusion: 'When one is French, one can only make quality films in France'. Presle is mentioned as 'the only first-rank star' to 'have thought it right to emigrate since the war', and she is the object of vicious remarks about advertisements which portray her as 'the most beautiful woman in France'.<sup>32</sup> It is an open-and-shut case, and the few incursions into Hollywood by Darrieux in the 1950s<sup>33</sup> certainly did not call this dogma into question: for French actors, Hollywood equalled mediocrity, vulgarity and humiliation.

Contrary to Presle, Darrieux and Morgan continued to be ever present on French screens in the postwar period. Their popularity with audiences did not wane during the 1950s, despite the emergence of new, overtly erotic female stars such as Martine Carol, Françoise Arnoul and Brigitte Bardot. Thus Presle's fate, beyond her personal choices, would seem to confirm the extreme hardening of the rivalry between French cinema and Hollywood after the war. The amicable sparring of the 1930s turned to resentment, mixed with cultural arrogance after 1945. This was no doubt a reaction to Hollywood's economic arrogance and power of seduction over mass audiences – cinema attendances were then at their highest and Hollywood films were preferred by exhibitors, though spectators indicated a preference for the homegrown product – but it is also true that French cinema had become a national issue, a major vehicle of national identity. The 'tradition of quality' lambasted by François Truffaut in his famous article in 1954<sup>34</sup> was at the core of a cultural strategy of resistance to Hollywood, and the departure of actors at the height of their talent was interpreted, consciously or not, as a 'desertion', a 'collaboration with the enemy', especially in the case of women who had more or less become national icons. The popular press, even

30 Patricia Hubert-Lacombe *Le cinéma français dans la guerre froide 1946–1956* (Paris: L. Harmattan, 1996).

31 Tacchella: even though he was still occasionally writing for *L'Ecran français* did not follow the hard Stalinist line that would lead to the disappearance, for lack of readers, of the weekly in 1953.

32 *L'Ecran français* no. 261, 3 July 1950.

33 According to *Cinéma* no. 863, 10 February 1951, Danielle Darrieux 'has made *Rich Young and Pretty* in Hollywood and has brought back photographs with her. She had to put on a few pounds to play a mother. When she tells us about Hollywood in 1950, she seems a bit disappointed. She found the cinema capital changed, but not for the better. In 1951, Fox offered her the female lead in *Five Fingers*, a part Presle had just turned down. The French reception of the film was hostile, especially with regard to Darrieux's part which was created by the scriptwriters to add spice to a true story set during World War II. In September 1956, *Alexander the Great* – a big budget production directed by Robert Rossen fleeing the McCarthy witch hunt – received an even worse reception. Darrieux played the hero's (Richard Burton) mother even though, as she complained, she was only seven years older than the British actor! The few critics who saw the film made little or no mention of her performance.

34 Une certaine tendance du cinéma français, *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 31 (January 1954).

though it functioned as a vehicle for American cinema and its stars, does not seem to have challenged this Manichean vision of Hollywood whenever French actors were concerned, though euphemism remained the rule.

There was thus a national consensus for the defence of French cinema which, together with the less than gratifying way French actresses were used by the Hollywood studios,<sup>35</sup> made it difficult or even impossible for a French star to have a double career. The dream expressed by the young Darrieux in the 1930s to alternate American and French films was not only utopian, it had become a betrayal. It is thus interesting to note that the opposition between a high quality French cinema with added cultural value and the commercial products of Hollywood is a notion with a long history. It clearly preceded the emergence of auteur cinema with which it tends to be associated today.<sup>36</sup>

This essay has only looked at the French reception of the Hollywood films made by Darrieux, Morgan and Presle. To conclude, I would like to suggest some lines of investigation concerning these actresses' films and their reception in the US context.

The characters played by these three actresses were, for the most part, French (seven out of thirteen), European or Latino-American. They escaped the two recurrent US film stereotypes of the time, the girl next door and the ordinary housewife. Instead they played women who were foreign in every sense of the word, women who had broken ranks in one way or another, who were exiled, widows, divorcees, adulterous. They embodied a dangerous deviation from US patriarchal norms. Their fate was therefore nearly always tragic: in dramatic genres (ten films), it meant the departure or death of the beloved man or the death of the woman.<sup>37</sup> The two happy endings (*Two Tickets to London* and *The Chase*) are somewhat relativized by the ordeals the heroine has had to suffer. Only the three comedies (*Rage of Paris*, *Higher and Higher* and *Rich, Young and Pretty*) offer them unadulterated happiness.

The importance of the three stars within the story varied, but only in the first two films in the corpus examined do they play the lead part. More often than not, their roles served to highlight the masculine protagonists in male genre films such as war films, spy films, thrillers (seven films out of thirteen), leading to a condescending or even non-existent critical reception. Rather than echoing Molly Haskell's formula that 'in English, they all managed to sound like parodies of themselves',<sup>38</sup> I would say that they were pale copies of themselves in the sense that their status as top-billing stars was put into question in Hollywood, and that the lesser importance of their parts led to the simplification of their characters. Perhaps this was also a consequence of the mismatch between

<sup>35</sup> See my paper concerned with the image of the French woman as constructed by Hollywood cinema through the American films of Darrieux, Morgan and Presle (due to have been presented at the international colloquium on European Actors in American Cinema organized by Ginette Vincendeau and Alastair Phillips).

<sup>36</sup> See in particular, Pierre Bourdieu 'Questions to the real masters of the world' *Le Monde* 14 October 1999.

<sup>37</sup> For more on this point see Christian Vivanti 'On the edge of transgression: the "foreigner" in classical Hollywood Cinema' in Alastair Phillips and Ginette Vincendeau (eds) *Journeys of Desire: European Actors in Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute forthcoming).

<sup>38</sup> Molly Haskell *From Reverence to Rape: the Treatment of Women in the Movies*, second edition (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press 1987) p. 279.

Hollywood genres and the French genres within which they had built up their image: light boulevard comedies and drama for Darrieux, poetic realism for Morgan and noir realism for Presle. These three typically French tendencies had no equivalent in Hollywood. Hollywood had noticed Darrieux in a dramatic part (*Mayerling*, Anatole [Litvak, 1935]), and the same was true for Morgan (*Le Quai des brumes*), and Presle (*Boule de suif* [Christian-Jaque, 1945]). None of these roles corresponded to the codes of feminine morality 'made in Hollywood', but conversely none was comparable either to the figure of the 'fallen woman' or the femme fatale.<sup>39</sup> Darrieux, Morgan and Presle were difficult to assimilate within the 'woman's film', typically concerned with the home, because they were foreign and because they did not correspond to the actress types usually associated with this genre. As a result they were reduced to playing incidental roles in genres dominated by male actors, and thus prevented from deploying their acting talent.

The studios' recruiting policies were not without contradictions. They hired European stars on the basis of their image in their countries of origin, but did not create the right conditions for valorizing that image in Hollywood. Only *The Rage of Paris* can be considered to showcase Darrieux's strength in the light-hearted register she was familiar with, but she was not able to consolidate this position because of the war. Could it also be that the famous advertisement taken by cinema exhibitors the same year, denouncing Garbo and Dietrich among others as 'box-office poison', made the studios more wary of European stars?<sup>40</sup>

These three stars, moreover, were not in control of the circumstances and conditions of their stay in Hollywood. The war for Darrieux and Morgan, matrimonial ups and downs for Morgan and Presle, and as a balance of power which was generally less favourable to actors in Hollywood than in Europe, all explain the mediocrity of their careers.<sup>41</sup> It should also be said that their gender made their professional autonomy in Hollywood more difficult, especially for Morgan and Presle who were married to an American, Bill Marshall. Both actresses claimed in their memoirs that their marriage to him had a catastrophic effect on their choice of film projects because of the way in which he took a controlling hand.

The failure of Darrieux, Morgan and Presle to carve out a Hollywood career, beyond the diverse circumstances of their Hollywood experience, testifies, without doubt, to the structural differences between the two national cinemas on both an economic and cultural level. It also shows difficulties specific to female stars. On the one hand their professional independence was less, and on the other the identities of the female characters they portrayed were, contrary to appearances, more difficult to export than masculine images.<sup>42</sup> Should these failures be attributed to the stereotype of the *petite femme de Paris*, which condemned French actresses in

<sup>39</sup> Darrieux was the secret mistress of Archduke Rodolphe (Charles Boyer) in *Mayerling*. Morgan the lover of deserter Jean Gabin in *Quai des brumes* and Presle a patriotic prostitute in *Boule de suif*. Contrary to appearances even this last part had nothing to do with the figure of the fallen woman.

<sup>40</sup> Wake up Hollywood producers! signed by the Independent Theater Owners Association, *Hollywood Reporter* 3 May 1938.

<sup>41</sup> See Michèle Morgan *Avec ces yeux-là* (Paris: éditions Laffont 1977) and Micheline Presle *L'Arrière Mémoire* (Paris: Flammarion 1994).

<sup>42</sup> See also Alastair Phillips *Changing bodies/changing voices: success and failure in Hollywood in the early sound era* in this dossier and Ginette Vincendeau *An inexportable French type: Jean Gabin in *Moontide* and *The Impostor** and Hilary Radner *Louis Jourdan: hyper-sexuality and national identity* in Phillips and Vincendeau (eds.) *Journeys of Desire*.

Hollywood to portray a form of seduction as frivolous as it was limited? As none of their films was successful on account of their presence, it is difficult to say for sure, but the earlier success of Garbo's and Dietrich's images of fatal Nordic seduction may be taken as evidence *a contrario*

Translated from the French by Leila Wimmer and Ginette Vincendeau

# reports

## **First European Psychoanalytic Film Festival, BAFTA and Regent's College, London, 1–4 November 2001**

Organized by the British Psychoanalytical Society and impressively located in BAFTA's home on Piccadilly, the First European Psychoanalytic Film Festival showed all the signs of productive collaboration between the two sides of what has been perhaps the most compelling alliance in the history of film studies – psychoanalysis and cinema. Combining workshops and panel presentations with film screenings and discussion, and attended by a number of rather illustrious film industry personalities (Bernardo Bertolucci is honorary president of the BPS), EPFF at times, however, seemed as much a part of the frenzy of celebrity as an attempt to explore the significance of contemporary European cinema's uniquely psychoanalytic imagination.

The first morning began with an exceptional panel chaired by Laura Mulvey 'Film, Feminism and the Maternal Body'. As Mulvey started to describe the specific political and historical conditions which had made possible the production of experimental feminist films in the 1970s, I could not help reflecting on the conditions of possibility of this particular panel, this exploration of the maternal imaginary in two of those films. Where else today, apart perhaps from a film festival with an audience of psychoanalysts, might you find an opening panel devoted to questions about the political significance of maternity and the attempt to find a new filmic language with which to articulate the 'repressed' of patriarchal culture? Being made available to a new audience, these long forgotten debates suddenly felt fresh and urgent. In her paper, 'Abjection, abstraction. Akerman', Whedbee Mullen offered rigorous and powerful close textual analyses of Chantal Akerman's *News From Home* to

explore the dialogue between the city and the mother–daughter relationship. The exquisite intimacy with which Mullen approached single shots and edits from the film, along with her sustained analysis of the contrapuntal movement of voiceover and image-track, fed into a most persuasive reading of the film text in terms of the language of psychic ambivalence. Mandy Merck's paper, 'The maternal body and the lesbian relationship: a return to Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers*', raised the question of the usefulness of psychoanalytic theory for configuring the lesbian subject of desire. Revisiting an argument between Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis (Silverman reads *The Gold Diggers* as eliding the mother–daughter relationship with female homosexuality while de Lauretis contests such a confusion of lesbian desire with the maternal imaginary), Merck too used close analysis of the relationship between sound and image-track to explore the possibility of a lesbian desire founded on difference rather than narcissistic identification.

Later that afternoon, David Rodowick introduced the panel, 'Screening Desire: Cinema's Dreamings and Realities', which included contributions from Elizabeth Cowie – 'Screening memory: allegorical dreaming and tales of the past in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and *Persona* (1966)' – and Vicky Lebeau – 'Another child of violence? Werner Herzog's *The Enigma of Kasper Hauser*'. Both were suggestive attempts to theorize the spectator–screen relationship beyond the established orthodoxies of Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. Cowie drew on Wilfred Bion's theory of 'alpha' and 'beta' dreams and Jean Laplanche's concept of the 'enigmatic signifier' in an attempt to conceptualize the spectator–screen relationship in terms of transference and counter-transference. Lebeau explored the way a single shot from *Kasper Hauser* seems to metaphorize an anxiety about the

impoverishment of vision described by one of D W Winnicott's patients ('wouldn't it be awful to look in the mirror and see nothing') and which Winnicott explains in terms of the absence of the mother's face in whose reflection the child's self may be formed Lebeau concluded with a challenge for future work the 'maternal' dimension of cinema might offer useful ways of reconceptualizing the spectator-screen relationship

Aside from their focus on British and European films, however, these two panels were relatively untypical of the kinds of psychoanalytic engagement with cinema taking place elsewhere at EPFF The sessions I attended were concerned primarily with the cinematic experience of trauma and mourning, often addressing the ways that mourning establishes links between history and psyche, between cultural and individual memory. These questions were factored through discussion of a number of films which address historical and personal trauma, the most suggestive of which included *Kissing Buba* (Lindy Heyman, UK, 2000), *Marsal/Marshal, Tito's Spirit* (Vinko Bresan, Croatia, 1999), and *La Stanza del Figlio/The Son's Room* (Nanni Moretti, Italy, 2001)

As the model for representing trauma in the cinema, the Holocaust has provided a means of reflecting on the propensities of film to represent the unspeakable The short *Kissing Buba* explores the relationship between a young Jewish girl and her grandmother – a concentration camp survivor – who lives alone in a tiny flat relentlessly replaying the traumatic experiences of her youth. Although the film's reception at EPFF included several compelling analyses of trauma and mourning, there seemed to me a rather conspicuous omission of any analysis of film as a system of representation Assertions such as 'all films engage with the powerful work of mourning', and 'film is uniquely suited to represent trauma because it can represent the unsymbolizable', were offered up as

unproblematic, and hung somewhat tantalizingly in the air

Screened earlier in the day, similar speculations were generated by *Marsal* – a parodic comedy in which a group of ex-army faithfuls believe that the ghost of former Yugoslavia's Communist leader Josip Broz Tito is haunting their village, but soon discover him to be an escapee from the local psychiatric hospital who believes himself to be Tito In her analysis, Ljiljana Filipov suggested that the film offers itself up to spectators as a mode of abreaction, a way of dispensing with the affect attached to the memory of a totalitarian past In my view, although *Marsal* undoubtedly explores the work of cultural and individual mourning (the process of detachment that takes place after the death of a loved object), this does not equate to enabling spectators to work through that process. In its insistence on the connections between history and psyche, and between historical and personal trauma, *Marsal* seems, rather, to place questions of spectatorship in something of a double-bind. For if film is uniquely suited to represent trauma, does this mean that spectatorship should be thought of as a process of working-through, or might it be best understood as a mode of 'bearing witness', of refusing to let such experiences disappear?

In her introduction to a recent edited collection on psychoanalysis and cinema, *Endless Night*, Janet Bergstrom laments the relative lack of interest in the cinema shown by psychoanalysts 'a cursory review of psychoanalytic journals turns up significant writings by psychoanalysts on literature and art, but not on the cinema' (Janet Bergstrom, 'Introduction parallel lines', in Bergstrom [ed ], *Endless Night. Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London. University of California Press, 1999], p 2) The very existence of EPFF should perhaps make us rethink this claim I might also mention the following: in 1997, *The International Journal*

of *Psychoanalysis* established a regular slot for film discussions, since 1986. *The Forum for the Psychoanalytic Study of Film* has organized community screenings and discussions as well as the publication of a quarterly journal, and the British Psychoanalytical Society is currently holding a series of film screenings and discussions at the ICA. Bergstrom also mentions the need for dialogue between analytic practitioners and film studies academics, a 'dialogue between constituencies' which, she comments, may well be 'blocked to a surprising degree' (p. 1). Many of the panels at EPFF that sought to define cinema as the practice that brings together the technology of history with the technology of the psyche were, therefore, very welcome.

What concerned me, however, was the form taken by the many conversations with filmmakers who had attended to present their films. More or less exclusively, the dialogue that took place was between filmmakers and psychoanalysts although academics participated in a small number of the panel presentations, they were notably absent from workshops and screening discussions. When filmmakers expressed their gratitude to the audience for an unusually sustained and penetrating exploration of their work, they were, therefore – and almost without exception – referring to an analysis in which film was conceived as the expression of the filmmaker's 'inner world', and to readings of the unconscious motivations and fantasies of diegetic characters. It was in these terms of exchange between filmmakers and psychoanalysts that the absence of sufficient engagement from film studies academics was, for me, most profoundly felt.

My most enduring memory of EPFF remains sitting in the cinema crying quietly behind my tissues while watching Nanni Moretti's *La Stanza del Figlio* with an audience of around a hundred psychoanalysts bawling unrestrainedly. Instead of taking a Sunday afternoon walk with his son, the

psychoanalyst in *La Stanza Del Figlio* (played by Moretti) chooses to respond to a desperate phone call from one of his patients, and visits him at his home for an impromptu session. The son decides to go diving with friends and is fatally injured. The second half of the film explores the process of the analyst's mourning, its effects on the family and the psychoanalytic situation. Unable to cope with his feelings of guilt and aggression, the analyst concludes his relationship with his patient and ultimately stops working altogether. Thus the film's exploration of the work of mourning depends absolutely upon this one detail – that the analyst chose to visit a patient at his home.

In the morning following the screening, the film was much praised for its 'truthful' and 'human' representation of a psychoanalyst, a representation which, many claimed, responded well to the complexity of an analyst's life. One commentator spoke for many, nonetheless, when she pointed out to Moretti that an analyst would never have visited a patient at his home under such circumstances. Moretti's rebuttal – 'in Italy, and in my film, an analyst would!' – punctured the otherwise ubiquitous atmosphere of approbation, and the offence was quickly masked behind a murmur of uncertain laughter. This moment was not forgotten, however. In the closing plenary, a number of delegates made it clear that Moretti's remarks had been offensive: he was implying, they said, that analysts defending such personal-private boundaries were not sufficiently compassionate. Several spoke out in support of the analyst who had dared pose the question to Moretti, and many angrily condemned his response.

This incident was undoubtedly pivotal to the attempt at EPFF to define the grounds of an encounter between psychoanalytic and film communities. That such a key moment in the process of self-naming should be so intimately bound up in the language of offence – of assault, defence and retaliation –

suggests that something about the intimate coupling of psychoanalysis and cinema disturbs. In my view, the troubled relationship between psychoanalysis and cinema, as between spectator and screen, might be best pursued by paying attention to the powerful

and unsettling accounts of idealization, reparation and identification perhaps described best in the work of Melanie Klein

*Suzy Gordon*

## reviews

### review:

**Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: the Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 2000, 234 pp.**

**Duncan Petrie, *Screening Scotland*. London: British Film Institute, 2000, 250 pp.**

### PHILIP SCHLESINGER

'National cinema' has been both the focus and frame for much film scholarship, a trope whereby analysis of the territorial basis of production, auteurship, institutions, textuality and consumption can be conveniently handled, most usually as occurring within the boundaries of states. The underlying logic of the discourse has been provided by a century-long concern with the interconnections between the moving image and collective (most particularly, national) identity. Beneath this, there lurks a persistent conception of the nation as an expressive totality and of film as *a* (if not *the*) key mode of cultural expression.

Film studies' concern with the conditions of survival of national cinemas has been first cousin to the more official worries of state policymakers and a recurring theme in the defensive discourse of national intellectuals. The central problem of national cinema – how we can as a nation ensure that indigenous production might survive and offer us images of ourselves, both contemporary and past, that will undergird our continuity and reflect our particularity – is given its politico-cultural edge by the global domination of Hollywood. Without the North American hegemony, it is trite to say (but true), there would not be the obsessive and repetitive need to stand up and be counted as distinctive cinematic collectivities. Arguments about

- 1 At one level the question of national cinema is presently undergoing reappraisal. The stability of the very term has been thrown into question as the nation state – long the anchorage point for the discourse of national cinema – has changed in the global political economy. See Philip Schlesinger, 'The sociological scope of "national cinema"', in Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (eds), *Cinema and Nation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 19–31. Parts of this collection make an important revisionist intervention.
- 2 A complementary account of Scotland as a distinctive space of political communication is in Philip Schlesinger, David Miller and William Dinan, *Open Scotland? Journalists, Spin Doctors and Lobbyists* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001).
- 3 For political background see Robert Hazell (ed.), *The State and the Nations: the First Year of Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 2000).

national cinema, therefore, are integral to each generation's understanding of the world's cultural geography. They are also part of the periodic temperature-taking needed to assess collective well-being. And they are integral to a much wider debate about the sociology of nationalism – indeed, of transnationalism – which is where film studies may one day be illuminatingly located.<sup>1</sup>

Our two authors have chosen to write effectively about cases that may be usefully compared and contrasted. Petrie's bailiwick is Scotland, about which he writes as a southern exile, albeit one who has kept his finger on the pulse. Scotland is a 'stateless nation' that, in 1999, achieved a major measure of autonomy within the UK. Scotland's parliament was reinstated after a hiatus of almost three centuries. 'Devolved' Scotland remains a part of Great Britain, but it is becoming increasingly differentiated from its neighbours both culturally and politically. Some see devolution as an inevitable staging-post to independence.<sup>2</sup> Scotland is both British and Scottish in its media institutions and screen output. Unresolved tensions abound due to the country's subordinate relationship to England. And as London acts as a magnet for ambitious media folk while remaining a prime source of finance, the south is both a threat and opportunity for screen culture.

For his part, McLoone takes Ireland as his object of study. He is also a writer with some distance from the centre – this time Dublin – as he lives in Northern Ireland, a province of the UK formally devolved but still mainly ruled by London.<sup>3</sup> Once again, questions of constitutional status are an inescapable backdrop to the analysis of the moving image. If 'Irish film' is taken to be that produced in the Republic of Ireland, then the national cinema in question is encased by a state that formally seceded from the UK in 1922 after a bloody war of independence. Aside from the long history of repressive English and then British rule, the culture has been deeply marked by the legacy of a formative civil war and the continuing republican struggle to unify the island. The place of Catholicism also looms large. Northern Ireland remains contentiously within the UK but, as McLoone shows, you cannot discuss Irish cinema without taking the north into account. Nor indeed can you discuss the Republic without noting the role latterly played by the UK, both as a source of moving-image finance and as a career destination for filmmakers.

Two small nations then, both travelling under the somewhat elastic label of celticity, both in complex and intertwined relations with England, both – for certain kinds of nationalist – 'incomplete', both seeking their places in the European Union and needing to devise strategies towards Brussels, the source of Euro-money, both with major experiences of migration and a sense of peripherality, and both, with their tiny film industries, under the perpetual shadow of Hollywood and significantly affected by London's media economy.

Yet, these parallels aside, what is striking is the extent to which

diverse experiences of statehood and nationhood really do make a difference to film and broadcasting policy, institutional development, market opportunities and the palette of cultural themes realized on screen. In their specificity, therefore, both books undoubtedly testify to the continuing viability of a certain style of studying 'national cinema'.

McLoone's book paints a broader canvas than Petrie's. Where *Screening Scotland* is highly circumscribed by its national object, *Irish Film* is the more traversed by transnational currents from the USA, the EU and the Third World. For instance, the high consciousness of Ireland's erstwhile colonial status offers him an *entrée* to debates about 'third cinema' and cultural imperialism. While Petrie too rehearses current academic and politico-cultural debates, and also touches on the colonial image, the Scottish intellectual field he tills is simply more inward-looking. Perhaps one should not make too much of this contrast between Irish expansiveness and Scottish self-referentiality, but it seems to reflect aspects of the two countries' status as, respectively, state and nation, and the diverse imaginaries that political frameworks routinely engender.

McLoone's book is centred on fiction and moves continuously between discussions of framing debates in Irish politics, culture and history, and surveys of films (and the occasional television programme or series) that range from some quite detailed single analyses to thumbnail sketches. The author recognizes the seminal contributions made to the study of Irish cinema by John Hill, Luke Gibbons and Kevin Rockett and situates himself in relation to their work, as well as that of numerous others.

Of McLoone's eleven chapters, the first three offer a very useful account of cultural nationalism, of some formative representations (with Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* [1934] and John Ford's *The Quiet Man* [1952] highlighted as pivotal sources of imagery and stereotypes) and also provide a discussion of the crucial importance of political violence for Irish cinema. The author then goes on to discuss modernization, the emergence of an institutionalized film culture – which occurred somewhat later than in Scotland – and the crucial filmmaking waves of the 1970s and 1980s. The last five chapters track the emergence of Ireland's short filmmaking, discuss quite sympathetically some of the more commercially oriented productions of the 'Celtic Tiger' of the 1990s, consider representations of cultural identity in relation to the USA and Europe, and discuss the place of the rural landscape, concluding with a lengthy account of Neil Jordan's *The Butcher Boy* (1997). This, read as a metaphorical meditation on 'the abused child of history', is taken to encapsulate many of Ireland's filmic preoccupations.

Flaherty and Ford play a rather central role in McLoone's analysis. Whereas Flaherty represents a powerful stereotyping indigenist

current. Ford is the paradigmatic purveyor of an Irish-American viewpoint (although in the author's view more self-knowingly than is generally acknowledged). Of especial importance in both cases is the mythologizing of Irish landscape and the ideology of 'the west' as the place of ur-Irishness. The pull of the rural has remained strong, by this account, and the urban industrial scene only began to be explored in the 1970s and 1980s. This marks a strong point of contrast with Scottish film where, as Petrie underlines, cinematic representations of both Edinburgh and Glasgow have long been spaces for elaborating a version of Scottishness that is a major counterpoint to the tradition of the Jacobite romance. *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) and *My Name is Joe* (Ken Loach, 1998) are obvious recent cases in point.

Underlying McLoone's film analysis is a narrative of emergence. Since the 1980s, there has been an increasingly diversified infrastructure for Irish film, some financed by the state through bodies such as the Irish Film Institute, some coming from the BFI and Channel 4. It was only as late as 1992 when the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition decided to make serious moves in building up the film industry, recognizing the contribution that a flourishing film culture could offer to the attractiveness of the place – not least in boosting tourism as well as developing the creative industries. As McLoone demonstrates, Ireland has travelled from tight censorship under the Free State to seeking its place in the wider marketplace, taking advantage of Ireland's anglophone status and of the tax breaks that have made it an advantageous location. 'Irish-Ireland' (for which Catholicism was central) lies somewhere in the past, but where the journey now leads is somewhat uncertain.

Petrie's account is the more tightly organized of the two. His is also the more sociological, incorporating some fieldwork-based interviews in the later pages. After a rapid introductory tour of recent Scottish politico-cultural debate, we encounter a book in two parts. The first is historical. Four chapters successively chart the Scottish contribution to British cinema, the country's peripherality and the imagined space this offers filmmakers, the romantic cinematic legacy of Jacobitism, and last, Scotland's urban-industrial face on screen. Petrie's project is to move beyond limiting labels such as kailyard, tartanry and Clydesideism to enlarge our sense of the complexity of Scotland's cinema. Inescapably present in these debates is Colin McArthur, whose contribution is both properly acknowledged and politely disagreed with.

*Screening Scotland's* second part argues that an increasingly autonomous national cinema has emerged north of the border. Over five chapters this theme is elaborated. The author traces the roots of sponsored documentary from the 1930s (the solid Griersonian tradition offering a major contrast with Ireland's lack). Attention then switches to a history of Scottish television drama and its gradual

meshing with filmmaking, noting the key importance here of Channel 4 as a funder. The last three chapters variously centre on the emergence of the Scottish feature film: first, most notably in the work of directors such as Bill Forsyth and Bill Douglas, then by examining the growth of a clutch of funding agencies which culminated in the creation of Scottish Screen, and finally, by discussing the productions of the 1990s that put Scotland on the cinematic map. Petrie's handling of institutional detail is surefooted and he pulls together much scattered material. The importance of the documentary tradition as a springboard for emergent feature film production is well demonstrated. Like McLoone, Petrie also offers a mix of both detailed and thumbnail film analyses. There is enough for the buff in both books.

In parallel with McLoone, Petrie lauds small-nation sustainable development. Anyone writing about this topic sympathetically almost inevitably becomes a cultural nationalist of sorts. To one quite close to the institutional support nexus in Scotland, it is striking (two years on) just how much Petrie's industry informants talked things up. There have been major ambitions – perhaps unrealizable ones – for Scottish Screen to be the midwife both of a national studio and a film finance company. We are still waiting for the first, and the second is on the scrap-heap. Envious eyes are cast at Ireland's tax breaks, and it is sorely remembered that *Braveheart* was largely lost to the Emerald Isle. That said, though, feature film production does continue – as do a variety of shorts – with a clutch of co-productions currently in prospect.

And yet, in the third year of the new devolved order, Scottish culture still merits only the sustained attention of a deputy ministerial portfolio and comes a poor second to sport. 'National culture' is a tricky topic in a devolved country: the devolvers worry that it could be harnessed to the independence cause and do not know how to handle it. Petrie could hardly have anticipated any of this, when writing in upbeat vein.

Two very useful books on national cinema in small countries, then, and both accessibly written. If McLoone's is the more wide-ranging and outward-looking, Petrie's is the more solidly researched and meticulously presented. Each merits its place in the film studies library and each could be beneficially read and used in teaching.

## review:

**Sam Rohdie, *Promised Lands: Cinema, Geography, Modernism*. London: British Film Institute, 2001, 280 pp.**

**DAVID PASCOE**

The cover of Sam Rohdie's haunting, challenging, and occasionally maddening book, *Promised Lands*, is adorned by two images which, taken together, represent the farthest reaches of his project – a remapping of the relation between cinematic form, the science of geography and the modern movement. The first is Vermeer's painting *The Geographer* (1669), which represents a cartographer, compass in hand and map before him, who, having ceased work for a moment of meditation, gazes into a corner of the room, or out through the great window of his studio; one cannot be sure of the direction. Behind him, on top of a cabinet, sits a globe, which juxtaposed with the map is meant to imply that he has in mind a new means of accurately recasting the globe's three-dimensional contours into a two-dimensional frame – a fresh illusion, a new projection. For Rohdie, the collocation of the globe and map within this static and sober image of rational process has larger significance, since they both 'miniaturise the world and at the same time bring it closer. This represents an important revolution not only because it displaces verbal testimony and speculation with the visual and the concrete, but that in doing so it alters perspectives.' Thus it anticipates the aesthetic effects of photography and cinema two centuries later, 'a new optics that touched on psychologies of sight and therefore desire' (p. 13). The companion image is a multiple frame excerpted from *Sideways Jump*, one of Eadweard Muybridge's filmed studies of human and animal locomotion, a series which altered perceptions just

as radically as did seventeenth-century geographies, but, suggests Rohdie, with the crucial qualification 'Muybridge was so caught in the dilemma of the natural and the illusory, the objective and the subjective, that many of his studies of movement fake continuities in order to make them appear more pleasing and more acceptable, by giving them a fluidity they lacked in fact but were sought for in conformity with ideas of the natural'. All of which means, as far as Rohdie is concerned, that 'Muybridge was a showman . . . one of the first illusionists of the early cinema' (p. 12)

Much of Rohdie's work over the last three decades has been an attempt to make sense of the alteration of perspective and the perpetuation of illusion at the heart of postwar European cinema. Naturally, a key figure for his critical practice is Federico Fellini (the subject of a long-planned but not yet written *Lexicon*) whose 'characters inhabit worlds of popular spectacle – variety, opera, television, the fairground – worlds enmeshed in fantasies and projections' (p. 3). In similar vein, Rohdie published *Antonioni* (1990) and drew attention to the manner in which the director's images derived from 'the non-figuration of surface, sand and sea which close over any tear within them, the nothingness of mist and atmosphere whose identities blur and cloud over', and to the fact that while such images may be as clear as Vermeer's, they are also unstable and impermanent projections (p. 2). His last book, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (1995), went still further to argue 'Images are the memory traces of an absent reality which can only exist again by being memorialised, carved up, disrupted and reprojected. Most films seek to make the absence present by an illusion of presence. Pasolini's interest was not to exploit the paradox but to point to it' (p. 53).

As one moves through the terrain of *Promised Lands*, it is clear that Pasolini's *oeuvre* has focused Rohdie's mind on the limits of his own – or indeed of any – critical approach to cinema. Writing about the controversial director, he claimed in 1995, 'placed my own language in crisis'; and perhaps it threatened much else, including his sense of the autonomy of screen studies. Rohdie's latest book implies that it was Pasolini who first made him realize that postwar Italian cinema and the subject of geography were not, in fact, that remote and unconnected. Geography, as it developed in the nineteenth century, was central to the very idea of modernity, with its desires and material consequences: on the one hand, an increase in wealth, technology, material progress, and on the other, dramatic shifts in values and cultures, often the destruction of whole peoples and environments and, for some, terrible, cruel poverty. Pasolini's work, in print and on film, crucially concerns the effects of such modernity, particularly in the so-called Third World – in Africa, the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, but most of all in the slums of Naples and amidst the poverty of the Italian South. Italy, at the

end of the war, was one of the poorest and least developed countries in Europe, but within just over a decade it became one of the continent's most advanced countries, accelerating into modernity with the 'genocidal tendency' of which Pasolini frequently spoke. Faced with such destruction, the only course open was 'the comparison of an existing reality to one that had once been and is now only imagined' (p. 111).

Formally, the argument of *Promised Lands* proceeds through fifteen loosely organized chapters, each of which contain elliptical accounts of locations ranging from Italy to Xanadu, interspersed with musings about the nature of cinema, comments on the distinction of certain auteurs (Fellini, Antonioni, Rohmer, Godard, Visconti, Rivette, Welles, and, of course, Pasolini) and snatches of an autobiography which connotes an unhappy childhood, parental rejection, bereavement, lost love. Above all, there hangs an overwhelming sense of dislocation. Early on, Rohdie admits that his lifelong 'search for home projected itself on to persons and places, films and books' (p. 23), and once again, that verb carries the cultural baggage for the book's, and its author's, lengthy journey. Consider, in this regard, the opening words of its Preface: 'I projected you into a future made of my present'. That second-person referent is as unclear here as it when it occurs elsewhere in *Promised Lands*. Does it denote a lover, real or imagined, or a cineaste reader, or even Pasolini himself, since 'To take a journey with Pasolini . . . can help you find what you are'? (p. 198). In the end, though, the home Rohdie constructs, a nostalgic 'rose-pink' version of Italy, consisting of 'smells of the trattoria . . . a noisiness, the casual nonchalant beauty of Italian taste, dusk in the Borghese Gardens, a sensuality that enveloped me everywhere, a warmth that was maternal but allowed me to breathe', vanishes into the air: 'I had made it up. Nothing of it was there' (p. 229). It was just an illusion, or, more precisely, a disillusion projected out of life.

How does Rohdie arrive at this vanishing point? At the heart of the book is an extraordinary geographical archive, *Les Archives de la Planète*, begun in 1909 and active until 1931, originally belonging to Albert Kahn and situated just outside Paris in Boulogne-Bilancourt on the Seine opposite St Cloud. For Rohdie, the distinction of the archive is that it exclusively visual in its documentation, that is, there are no written records, other than by caption. Instead it holds 180,000 metres of film, 4000 stereoscopic plates and 72,000 autochromes – the latter being colour photographs on a glass plate coated with light-sensitized potato granules in three colours. Each of these images is unique, positive and fragile, for though the autochrome can be copied onto celluloid or printed, it cannot be reproduced. The technology was invented by the Lumière brothers who worked on it for more than fifteen years and brought it to the market in 1907, when it proved popular for a time. Indeed, in

contradistinction to the possibilities of the autochrome, the brothers reportedly regarded the cinema as a 'novelty without a future'. For Rohdie, the significance of this archive was that its form initiated for modernity – as did the sciences of anatomy, astronomy and optics in the seventeenth century, the very objects caught in Vermeer's camera obscura – the dominance of the visual over the verbal 'Progress necessitated technologies of memory, like the gravure and the photograph to make memory seem real and hence what it represented as not lost' (p. 175)

That is the theory, anyway, but as Rohdie has recently announced an intention to confront theory with the *experience* of projection, so in the first chapter of *Promised Lands* he effectively provides the key moment of the book. He recalls the first time he saw autochrome images thrown onto a screen by magic lantern, in an auditorium in Pordenone, north-eastern Italy 'No visual experience I had had seemed to enclose me and address me so directly or transport me into another universe so real-seeming and so without substance. It was close as possible to love' A hundred pages later, Rohdie prints a large quotation in French, to form a self-contained section of chapter six. Either deliberately, or accidentally, the excerpt is not sourced, but is in fact a well-known passage from Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*, in which the narrator describes the effect of a magic lantern on his childhood

it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours . . . I found plenty of charm in these bright projections . . . But I cannot express the discomfort I felt at such an intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room which I had succeeded in filling with my own personality

This, then, is the central motif of *Promised Lands* the process by which the individual subject is projected out of itself by art, discomforted by illusion

Perhaps even more than Pasolini, Proust is the real master of this book, since his conception of modernity pervades so much of Rohdie's discussion of the relationship between place, desire and memory. As M. Charlus says in *A l'Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* 'A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shows us things that no longer exist' And it is Proust who conjoins the *zeitgeist* that gave birth to photography, and that which sustained Vermeer. Rohdie recounts how in May 1921, just over a year before he died, Proust went to see an exhibition of Vermeer's paintings in Paris. While gazing at the View of Delft (1660), Proust fainted, an incident fictionalized shortly after in *La Prisonnière* when the writer Bergotte, gravely ill, looks at the View, marvels at its artistry – an essence he has attempted, largely unsuccessfully in his own work –

and, at that very moment, expires. Rohdie rightly observes that 'The modernity of Proust's reaction to Vermeer is in its passion, almost a hysteria, a lack of measure added to the object' (p. 92). In fact, his own reaction to the *Archives de la Planète*, and before that to Pasolini's *Passion*, seeing in both the essence of an ideal aesthetic existence, might at first seem to be overwrought, out of keeping, lacking measure. Taken together, however, Rohdie's most recent books represent a serious and sustained project to engage with visual culture at its most fundamentally Proustian level, on the plane of desire.

## review:

June Givanni (ed.), *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image* London: British Film Institute, 2000, 256 pp.

### JACQUELINE MAINGARD

In the 1990s a number of important works on African cinema were published (in English) that began to meet the gap in academic material on the subject<sup>1</sup> The recent addition of Givanni's edited collection makes a special contribution to this growing body of work The primary reason for this is that its deliberations are framed by Sylvia Wynter's opening chapter, 'Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture', a deep and serious consideration of questions of epistemology, positioning African epistemology beyond the dominance of western epistemology This interweaves why and how African cinema is critically located to make the advancement of African epistemology possible Thus African cinema has a particular purpose rooted in 'a calling into question of the governing symbolic code enacting of Man' (p. 53), creating a symbiosis between cinema and epistemology in Africa that cries out to be conceptually articulated This articulation is therefore a significant step forward It helps make sense of the urgency, the energy and vibrancy, and the tensions and conflicts often present in debates about African cinema and its progress or lack of it

No doubt Wynter's engagement with symbolic codes is represented in the book's title, which, with its seemingly conscious oblique positioning between 'symbolic narratives' and 'African cinema', claims a unique interchangeability between the two, in itself an act of 'repositioning' beyond the western frame. There is a history behind this 'repositioning' that June Givanni alludes to in her

1 For example: Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: CA: University of California Press, 1994); Manthia Diawara *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: IN: Indiana University Press, 1992); and Imruh Bakari and Mbye Cham (eds) *African Experiences of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1995)

'Preface', and that is elaborated in Imruh Bakari's 'Introduction'. Here it is significant that the book is a record of a conference called 'Africa and the History of Cinematic Ideas' (organized by the British Film Institute in London in 1995). In the project's very conception the focus on epistemological issues was already in place, interpreted into a series of questions addressed by panellists. The conference itself was perceived within a 'continuum of debate and discussion' (p. 11), in a particular history of conferences and events following at least three other events (in the West): the 'Third Cinema Conference' held at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1986, the 'Celebration of Black Cinema Festival' held in Boston in 1988; and a conference on 'Black Cinema: A Celebration of Pan-African Film' at New York University in 1994. In the unfolding deliberations the reader cannot help but note that there are histories embedded in the debates themselves and indeed in the terms in which they are discussed by particular personalities. For the scholar of African cinema, the book thus provides a deeply engaging enactment of the continuing dramatic narrative that surrounds discussions of African cinema's iconographies, production, theorization, criticism, and audiences, often associated with illustrious figures in the history of African cinema and culture such as Ferid Boughedir, Manthia Diawara, Teshome Gabriel, Haile Gerima, Gaston Kabore, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Clyde Taylor and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. While Sylvia Wynter sets the scene, and Ella Shohat provides one of the responses, as does Mariama Hima, there is an otherwise distressing absence of women's voices in the presentations and discussions as they are recorded here, mirroring the realities of an African cinematic space in which, on the whole, women filmmakers are not yet significantly positioned. Nevertheless, the book helps to answer the questions that Gerima proposes will be asked by future generations of filmmakers: 'why we as filmmakers never grew from movie to movie, why there were gaps, why our experiments failed, what language we were using' (p. 132).

The summing-up at the end of the book, presented by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in 'The Homecoming of African Cinema', alludes to what seems at times to be clashes – 'heated exchange' (p. 239) – between the different categories of interest in African cinema, here primarily critics and filmmakers. In the debates themselves not enough recognition is given to the fact that those called critics are sometimes themselves also filmmakers and vice versa. While on the one hand the distinction between artist and critic is a useful one and indeed a 'felt' one, it can also be overstated. Ngugi wa Thiong'o works his way around this by commenting that: 'the worker in ideas and the worker in images need to work in a vital critical give-and-take that can only enhance the tradition as a whole' (p. 239). His paper is primarily, however, a sober reminder of Wynter's landscape of ideas, where for him the most important of her 'key images' is

'the notion of European modernity submitting the world to its memory' (p 240)

It is this conceptualization of memory that serves as the chief thread for Wynter's keynote contribution in the first instance and for the remaining chapters, though not always as a strong, conscious focus. But the significance of iconography in a world dominated by particular ways of seeing, and indeed creating, 'Man', as against a world that might give image to a new humanity cannot be overstated. If new conceptualizations of memory are to be entrenched, however vulnerably, beyond the dominance of western formulations of memory, then African cinema has an acutely special role to play in imagining and imaging them. This is the thrust of Wynter's argument. The difficulty with this argument is that it is a deeply complex one, emerging from a history of African philosophy (Valentin Mudimbe, for example)<sup>2</sup> that itself borrows in part from Foucauldian perspectives, cited at points by Wynter, and that weaves through a tapestry of conceptual terrain. This is rooted in a multitude of threads that take the reader across many fields including philosophy, art, religion, anthropology, biology, economics, politics and much more. And at times Wynter's writing style virtually locates the reader in the eye of the needle, always intrigued by the unfolding argument but not necessarily certain how the various strands hold together, how they necessarily advance the argument, in the way that they clearly do for Wynter. Thus for the student of African cinema, and for those not well-schooled in epistemological questions and their philosophical bases, this framing of the book may prove to be overwhelming. Nevertheless the essential argument is critical, and the book's overall value is indeed located in the debates that follow – that expand Wynter's argument for the unique contribution of African cinema.

Each chapter presents deliberations on a range of issues that include iconography, decolonization, genre and ideology, postmodernist criticism, information technology, indigenization and audiences. Ultimately, the focus on audiences that emerges throughout the book in various ways is perhaps the most challenging for a number of critical reasons that have not yet been sufficiently elaborated. There are serious difficulties in doing so, and statistics are not always reliable, as a number of writers make clear. Yet, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o laments, if African cinema does not have a 'homecoming' it cannot really develop itself. It needs to be made for African audiences. It needs to be local in order to be international. And to be properly local it needs to create local audiences. The importance of this is clearly implied by the ways that the lack of local audiences is referred to as 'the curse of African cinema' (p 120) and 'the anguish of a displaced cinema' (p 108).

Cinema has been (one of) the means of dominating African memory and it can and should be the means of emancipating it. This

2 See Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press/London: James Currey, 1988). *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press/London: James Currey, 1994).

is the message that the book expounds. Teshome Gabriel's discussion of cinema as an 'intolerable gift' is both intriguing and compelling. Based on his personal experience, he arrives at a proposition that the interrelationship between Africa as an idea and its imaging creates a 'transubstantiated cinema' (p. 99) where the cinema/image is 'never fixed' (p. 102), and offers not only the image itself but what it refers to, what falls in-between. The image is always more than itself. Ferid Bhougedir using the label of 'tendencies' in African cinema proposes useful categorizations. In a mapping of theories on genre and the auteur onto African cinema he shows how western/Hollywood modes of cinema can be, and are, inverted. The hero of African cinema, for example, is a representative of the collective rather than a lone individual. Here, the examples of Djibril Diop Mambety's films that Clyde Taylor analyzes in relation to a postmodernist criticism are especially significant. *Hyenas* (1992) makes no apologies for anyone, African or otherwise. Its particular marriage of form and content is not so much the 'delightful harmony' (p. 92) that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o would seek. Not that it is unpleasurable. But its warnings propose an Africa that is leached by global bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. And Africa is confused. Ultimately, perhaps, the answers lie in Africa's own diversities. So that the concern to group together Africa's cinemas and their conglomerate outcomes as a pool for reflecting Africa's images back to itself becomes one side of a project that equally needs to recognize differences. Based on regional identities, as Diawara suggests, such localized formulations of African cinema might make it possible to envision, enact and realize the utopias so desired, so necessary and so urgent.